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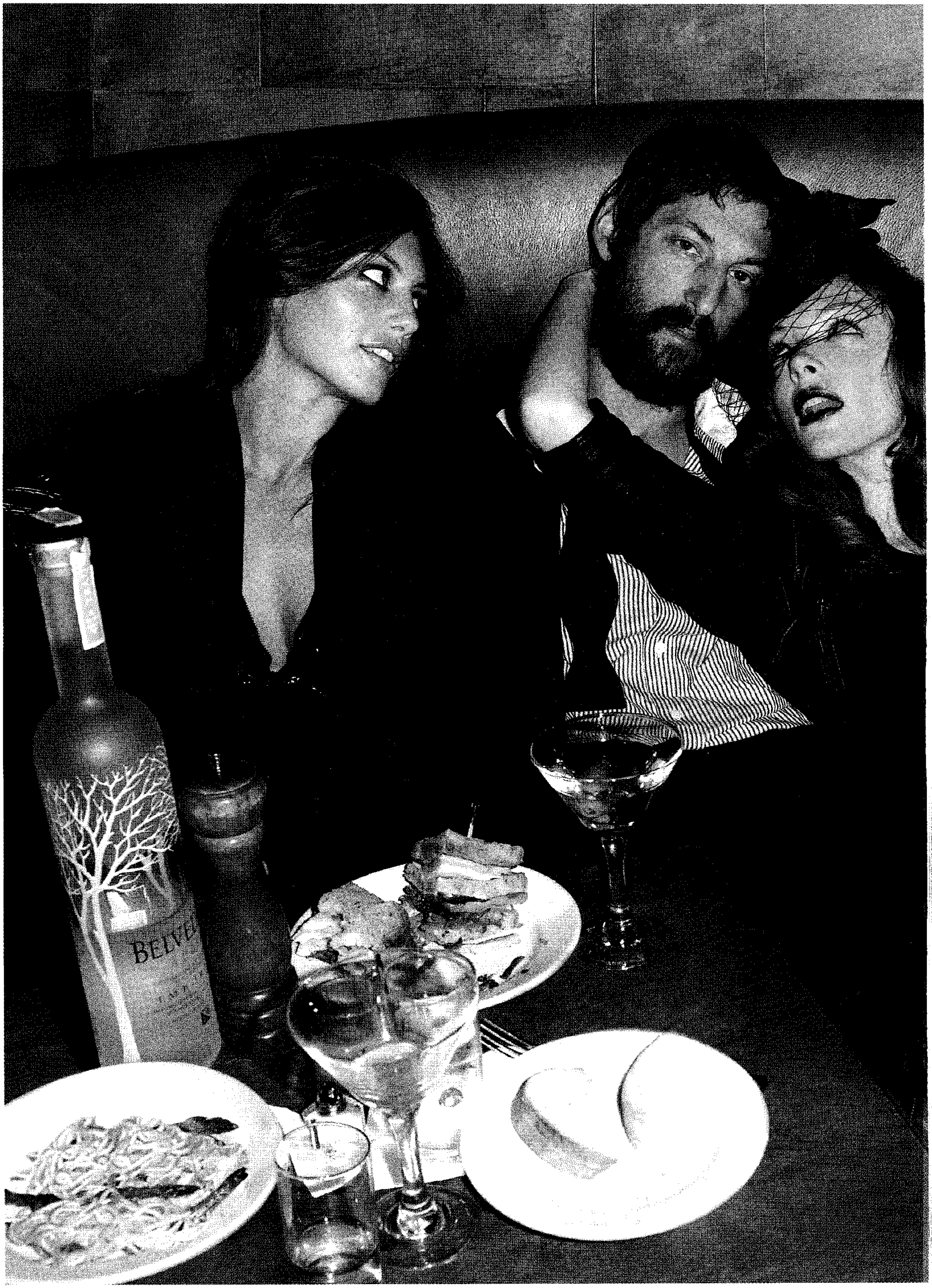
THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 19, 2007



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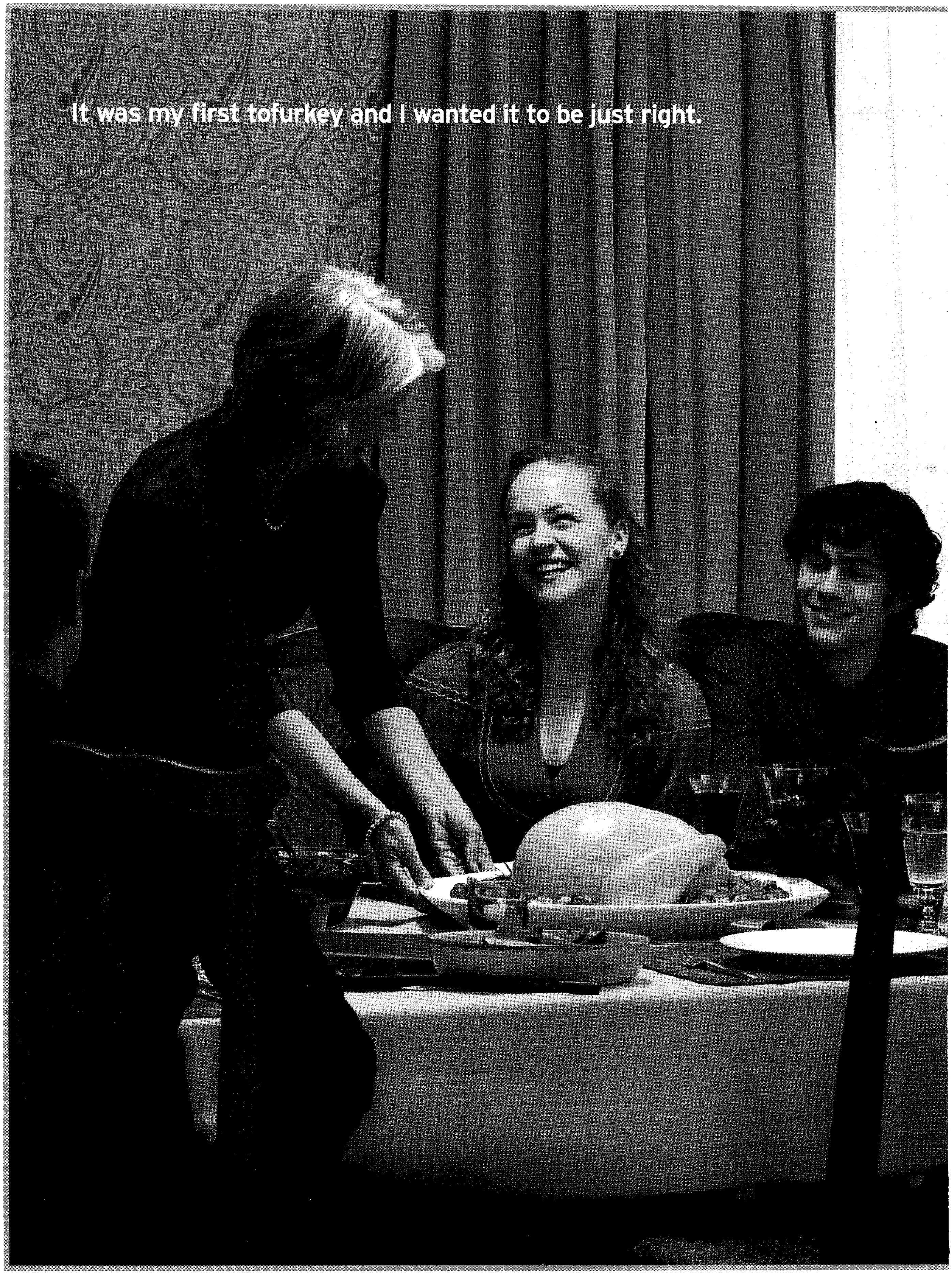
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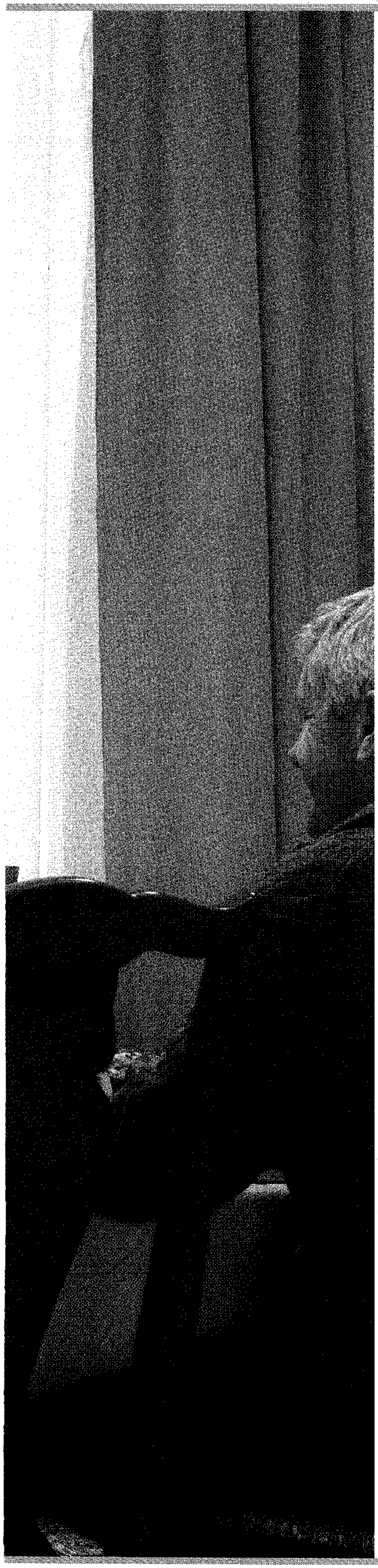

All the trimmings All in the family

Well, my son Jack went and married a vegetarian. So I grabbed my Citi card and went to the store. I picked up the old favorites like cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, green beans and turnips. As well as 15 pounds of "turkey" tofu. The dinner was a hit. Alice knows she's already more like a daughter than an in-law. And all around, our family was feeling a lot of love. My husband Steve especially loved that I made a small turkey for him to eat later. **Whatever your story is, your Citi card can help you write it.**

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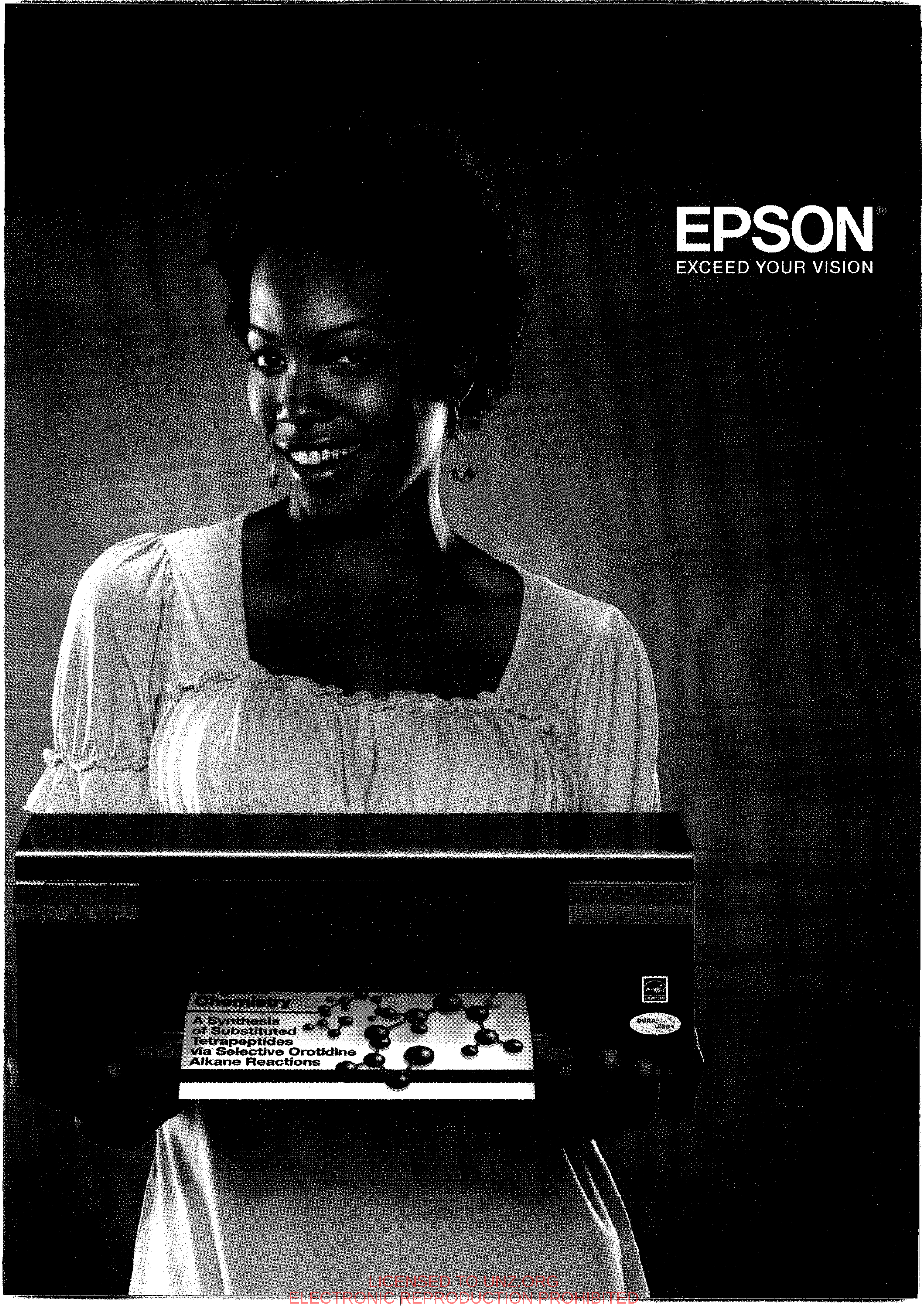
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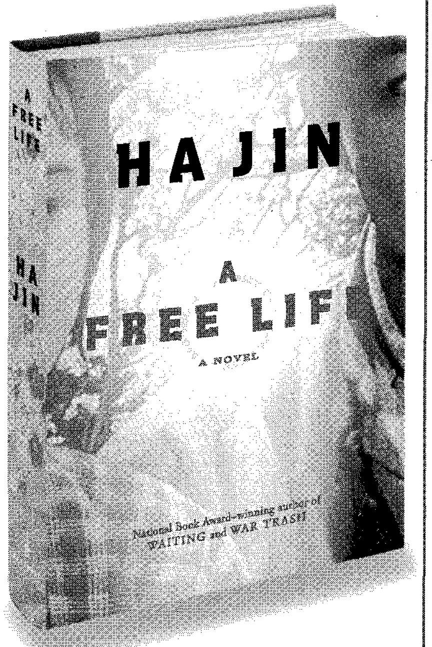

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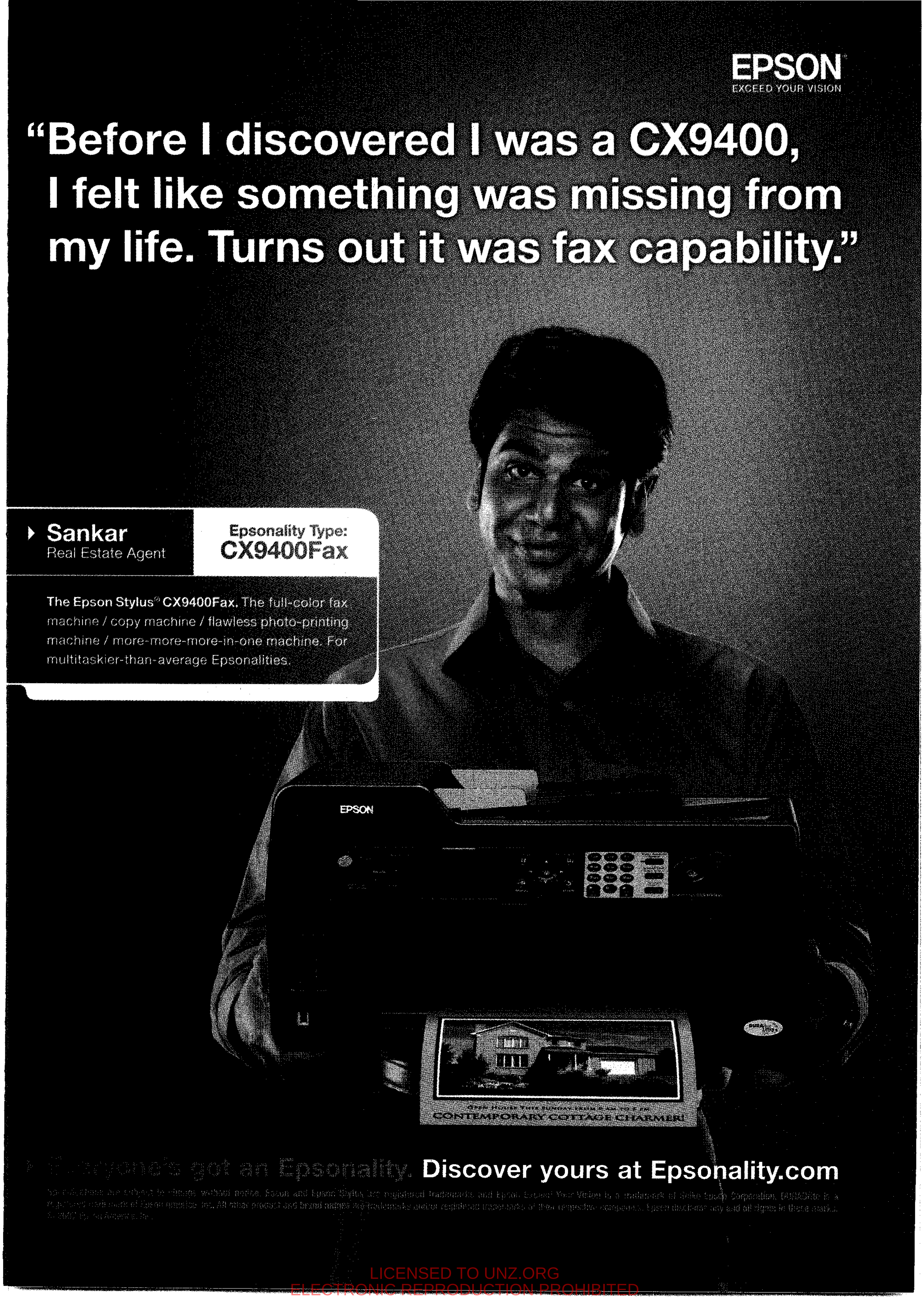
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CONTRIBUTORS

Jon Lee Anderson ("Inside the Surge," p. 58) is the author of "The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan" and "The Fall of Baghdad."

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Tom Reiss ("Laugh Riots," p. 44), the author of "The Orientalist," is writing a biography of General Alexandre Dumas.

Larry Doyle (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 51) is a screenwriter and a member of the Writers Guild of America. "I Love You, Beth Cooper," his first novel, came out in May.

Stephen S. Hall ("Small and Thin," p. 52), a science writer, has published five books, including "Merchants of Immortality" and "Size Matters."

Michael Longley (Poem, p. 66) was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2001. His "Collected Poems" came out in March.

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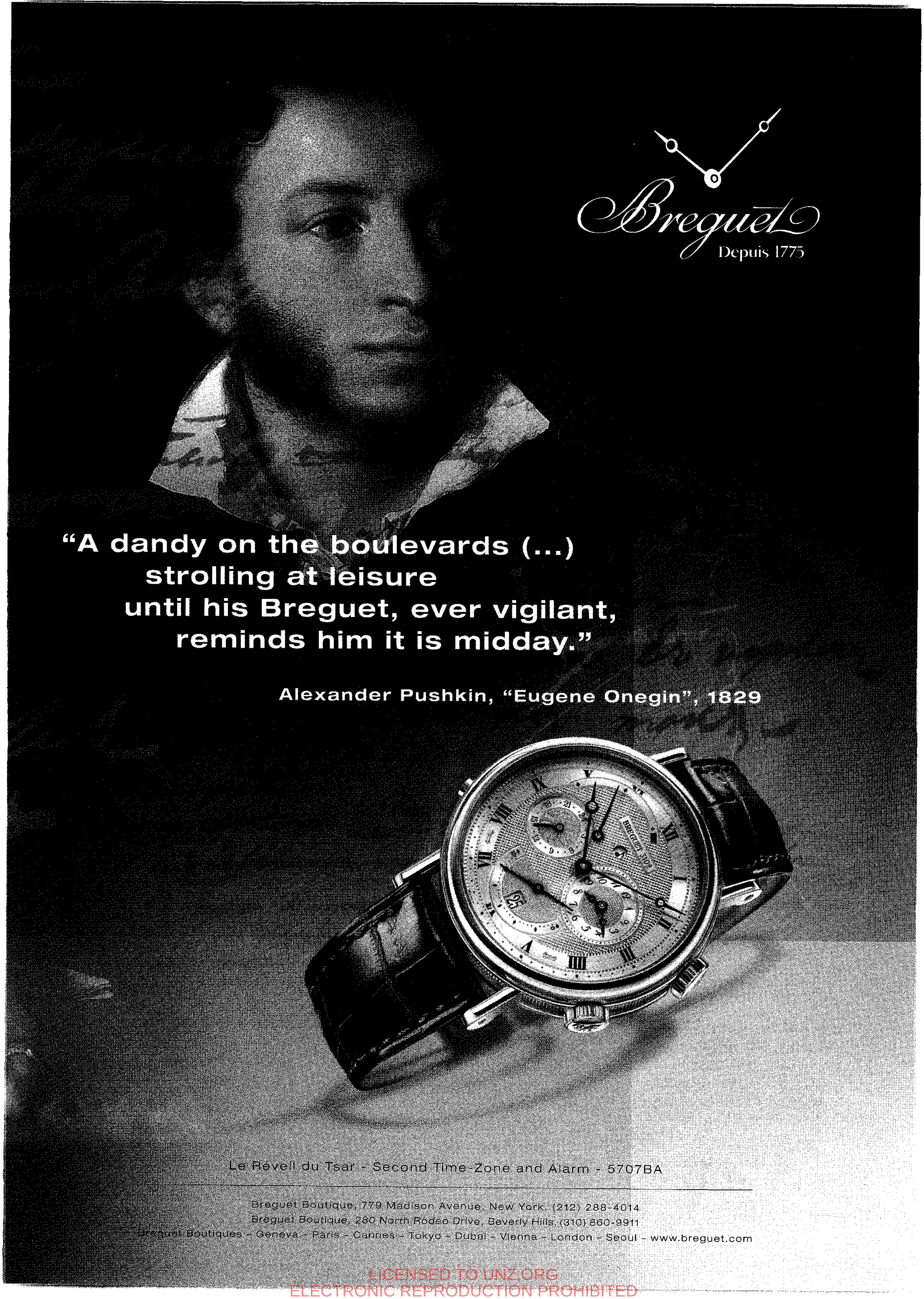
Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 98) writes a regular popular-music column for the magazine.

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 101), the magazine's architecture critic, holds the Joseph Urban Chair in Design and Architecture at the New School.

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 103) is the author of "Great Books" and "American Sucker."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
An audio interview with *Jon Lee Anderson*, and *Johan Spanner's* photographs of a Baghdad neighborhood affected by the surge. / *Dorothy Wickenden* talks with *Ryan Lizza* on a new podcast, The Campaign Trail. / *Antonya Nelson* reads a Mavis Gallant short story. / Blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer, Dana Goodyear,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones.* / From the archives: *William Dalrymple* on Pakistan, *Pauline Kael* on Mel Brooks, poems by *Mark Strand*, and thousands of book reviews. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events around the country.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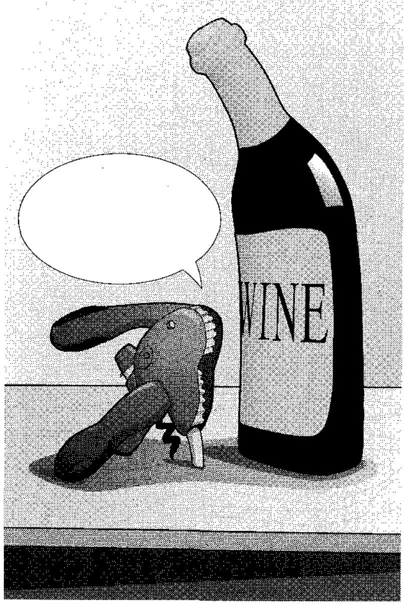

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INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

John Cassidy's piece on Victor Niederhoffer captures many of the investor's contradictions ("The Blow-Up Artist," October 15th). Niederhoffer is clearly a brilliant guy, but his reliance on statistical analysis and his apparent lack of a risk-management gene seem to be responsible for his repeated investing meltdowns. I think Nassim Taleb would agree that Niederhoffer's use of statistics to predict future behavior—specifically, his reliance on lognormal distributions (the bell curve) to accurately represent reality, and, more important, on past history as an indicator not only of what has happened but of what can happen—leaves him vulnerable to certain epistemological and financial hazards. Ignorance of potential low-probability high-impact events has taken down the likes of Niederhoffer, Long-Term Capital Management, and Julian Robertson, among other finance luminaries. Niederhoffer's oversight of this phenomenon and his willingness to bet big all the time have not only led to his downfall but may have made it a statistical eventuality.

George Peng
New York City

As a professional options trader at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, I found few redeeming qualities in Victor Niederhoffer as Cassidy depicts him. It seems to me that his trading style is governed by hubris, egotism, and self-glorification. These traits may have been beneficial to Niederhoffer on the squash court, but they are rarely viewed as assets on the trading floor. Irving Redel says, in Cassidy's piece, that "to be a great trader you need discipline" and "flexibility." Indeed, most professional traders have remarkably similar theoretical models; the best have the ability to recognize when the models are failing. No matter how correct one might be in the long term, an ability to mitigate one's risks in times of market unrest is crucial, and just plain smart. This seems to be something that Niederhoffer has yet to learn, despite more than three decades in the markets. "Cab" is slang for trading the small "put options" that Niederhoffer relishes in selling. There is a saying in the trading pits in Chicago—"Sell a cab, drive a cab." That may be where Niederhoffer is heading.

Michael Wien
Chicago, Ill.

DON'T HATE THE AGENT

Ben McGrath, in his piece on Scott Boras, describes me as an adviser who told Boras, "If you're good at what you do in the practice of law, ninety per cent of what is said about you will be negative" ("The Extortionist," October 29th). A lawyer, in other words, is often reviled just for doing a good job, and that seems to be the case with Boras. Some fans (I am one) believe in, as Susan Sarandon put it in the movie "Bull Durham," the "church of baseball." To us romantics, the current compensation system—in which the star player, with his star agent, sparks a bidding war and ends up with an exorbitant salary, while the journeyman player, without whom the game cannot be played, gets along on much less—is worrisome. However, the system is worrisome not because of agents like Scott Boras but because the rules for which the collective-bargaining process is responsible permit gross disparities in income levels. Boras is not an extortionist. He's a damned good lawyer who believes in doing a damned good job for his client—nothing more, nothing less—and he lives by the rules handed down by the collective-bargaining process, by the owners and the union.

Donald Wollett
Professor Emeritus of Law
University of the Pacific
McGeorge School of Law
Clinton, Wash.

•

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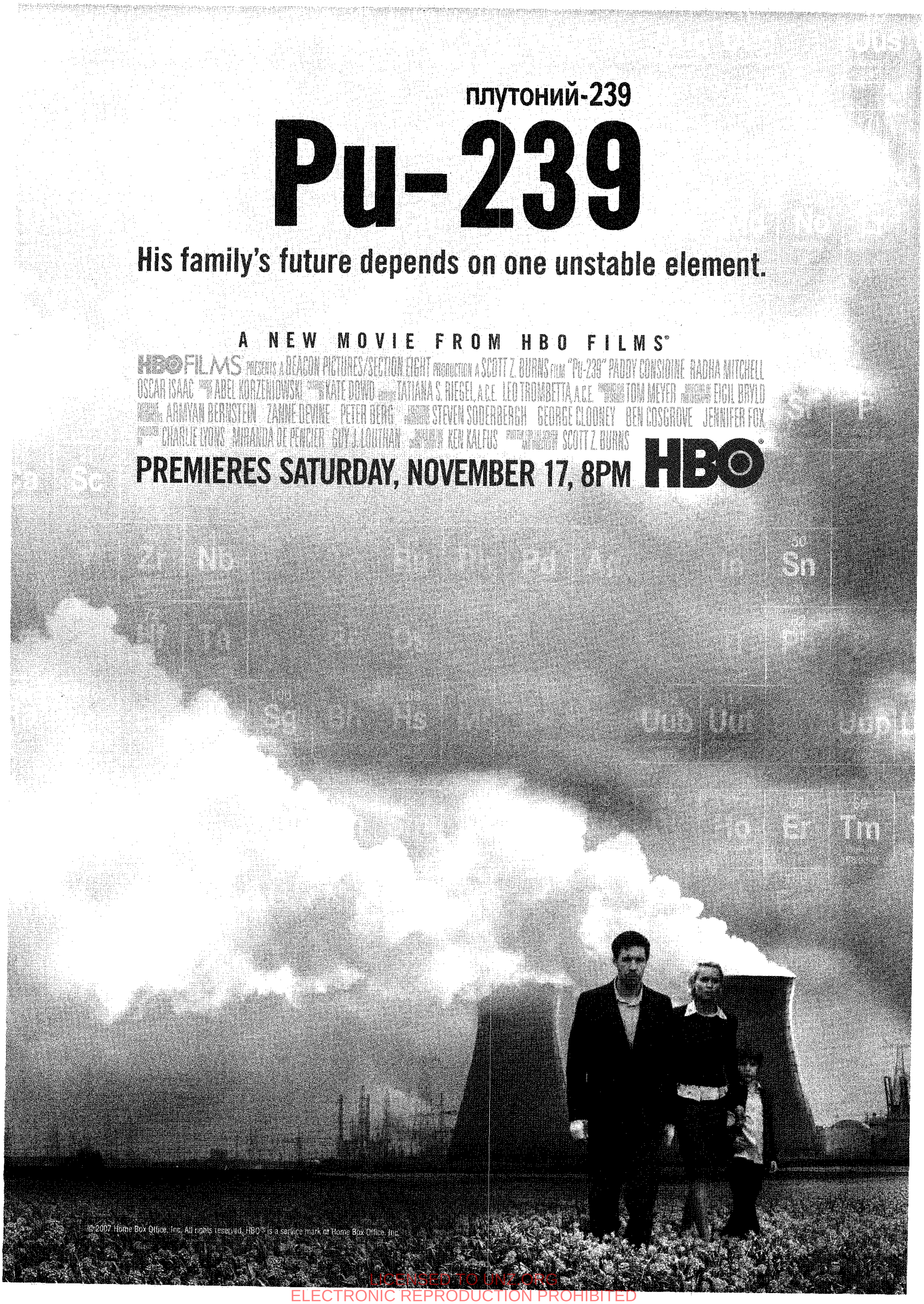

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Max Raabe and the Palast Orchester at Carnegie Hall, as part of "Berlin in Lights." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			14	15	16	17
18	19	20				

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
FACE-OFF

In 1988, David Henry Hwang was the first Asian-American to win a Tony Award for Best Play, for "M. Butterfly." His latest work, "Yellow Face," chronicles his infamous protest, in 1991, against the producers of "Miss Saigon" for casting the white actor Jonathan Pryce as a half-Asian pimp. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
SNEAK PEEK

The soulful Southern vocalist Shelby Lynne has a new album of Dusty Springfield covers, "Just a Little Lovin'," due out early next year. This week, she stops by the Hiro Ballroom for an intimate preview of the songs. (See page 16.)

ART
MOVING PICTURES

In his vivid 1940-41 "Migration" series, the painter Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) distilled the experience of millions of African-Americans who, like his parents, moved from the impoverished rural South to the industrial cities of the North in the years following the First World War. Lawrence organized the entire series into four movements of fifteen paintings each; the Studio Museum in Harlem exhibits seventeen of the work's sixty panels, on loan from the Phillips Collection. (See page 20.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LOSS LEADER

Daniel Bernard Roumain, a composer-violinist who blends classical, rock, and hip-hop influences with surprising aplomb, performs in the première of "One Loss Plus," a multimedia work that makes use of content found on sites like YouTube and MySpace, at BAM's Harvey Theatre. (See page 24.)

MOVIES
INDEPENDENTS' DAYS

It's harder than ever for worthy independent films to get released, and MOMA's "Best Film Not Playing at a Theatre Near You" series offers five that are still on the shelf, including the documentary "Off the Grid," about the unintended consequences of life in the wild; "Frownland," a dark-toned comedy about a drifter; and the family drama "August the First." (See page 30.)

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY
This Steppenwolf transfer by Tracy Letts ("Bug") is about the disappearance of an Oklahoma family man. In previews. Opens Nov. 20. (Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CONSTANT COUPLE
At the Pearl, Jean Randich directs this 1699 comedy by George Farquhar, set in London, about a colonel trying to win over a popular lady. In previews. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

CYMBELINE
Michael Cerveris, Martha Plimpton, and Phylicia Rashad star in the Shakespeare romance. Mark Lamos directs. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

DORIS TO DARLENE, A CAUTIONARY VALENTINE
Jordan Harrison's play interweaves stories from the eighteen-sixties, while Wagner is writing the Liebestod; the nineteen-sixties, when a young woman becomes a pop star; and the present day. Previews begin Nov. 16. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE FARNSWORTH INVENTION
Hank Azaria and Jimmi Simpson star in a new play by Aaron Sorkin, about Philo Farnsworth, the boy genius who invented television, and David Sarnoff, the head of R.C.A., who challenged his patent ownership. Des McAnuff directs. Opens Nov. 14. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

IS HE DEAD?
Michael Blakemore directs this recently unearthed comedy by Mark Twain, about an artist who fakes his death in the hope of inciting a bidding frenzy for his work. Norbert Leo Butz stars. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LITTLE MERMAID
Francesca Zambello directs an adaptation of the film, with a book by Doug Wright and music and lyrics by Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, and Glenn Slater. In previews. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.)

MISS WHITE HOUSE
Kaitlin Stillwell stars in this one-woman show by Ira Shapiro, about a female candidate running for President. Harland Meltzer directs. Previews begin Nov. 16. Opens Nov. 20. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 212-279-4200.)

OH, THE HUMANITY AND OTHER GOOD INTENTIONS
Marisa Tomei stars in the première of a new work by Will Eno, five short plays about everyday life. Jim Simpson directs. In previews. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE PIANO TEACHER
The Vineyard Theatre opens its season with the première of a new play by Julia Cho, about a retired piano teacher. Kate Whoriskey directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 18. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

PUMPGIRL
The Irish playwright Abbie Spallen wrote this drama, set in rural Ireland, about a gas-station attendant, the race-car driver she is obsessed with, and his wife. Carolyn Cantor directs. In previews. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

QUEENS BOULEVARD (THE MUSICAL)
Signature Theatre Company presents the première of a musical by Charles Mee, in which a groom gets caught up in the city streets on his wedding day. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

RAG AND BONE
At the Rattlestick, Sam Gold directs Noah Haidle's new play, about the owners of a ladder store that fronts for a black-market-heart enterprise. In previews. Opens Nov. 20. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

REBEL VOICES
A rotating cast—including Wallace Shawn, Lili Taylor, and David Strathairn—reads this stage adaptation of Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove's book "Voices of a People's History of the United States." Rob Urbinati adapted and directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 18. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

The Bird and the Bee pay a visit to the Blender Theatre at Gramercy.

DUPUYBERBERIAN

THE SEAFARER
Conor McPherson's new play, set in Dublin on Christmas Eve, follows two aging brothers, one of whom is blind. The cast includes Ciarán Hinds, Conleth Hill, and David Morse. McPherson directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 15. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

SECRET ORDER
Marrimack Repertory presents a thriller by Bob Clyman, about a young scientist on the brink of finding a cure for cancer. In previews. Opens Nov. 15. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

TRUMPERY
A new play by Peter Parnell, set in 1858, in which Charles Darwin is developing his theory of natural selection at the same time that another explorer comes up with the same theory, thousands of miles away. David Esbjornson directs. In previews. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

YELLOW FACE
Center Theatre Group co-produced this play by David Henry Hwang, inspired by his protest against the hiring of Jonathan Pryce in the original Broadway production of "Miss Saigon." Leigh Silverman directs. Previews begin Nov. 19. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

NOW PLAYING

THE BROTHERS SIZE
As directed by Tea Alagic, this production's excitement lays not in Tarell Alvin McCraney's flimsy, stereotype-laden script but in Alagic's brilliant orchestration of the actors and the stage. Working with a dramaturgically muddled conceit—two brothers struggle, but in ways that remain unclear, while a third character adds a little homoerotic tension—Alagic strips away the world that McCraney dresses up with his characteristic linguistic filigree and finds a psychological and intellectual depth. Elliot Villar is especially wicked in his role as Elegba, the all-knowing object of the other characters' affection, and the cause of their tension. When he takes the stage, we cannot look away. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

CYRANO DE BERGERAC
A superb revival of the 1897 play by Edmond Rostand, translated and adapted by Anthony Burgess and deftly directed by David Leveaux. Cyrano (Kevin Kline), a nobleman serving in the French Army in the seventeenth century, turns every occasion into an exhibition of aplomb. In the narrative of Cyrano's eloquent but unrequited love for his cousin Roxane (Jennifer Garner), the play traps a much deeper commentary on self-loathing and the humiliated heart. Cyrano's nose—which he calls his "gross protuberance"—is an offense both to others and to his own aesthetic ideal. As Cyrano, Kline is sensational, and Garner is every inch an object of desire. In this swashbuckling and subtle, breathtaking and heartbreaking production, you feel the selfishness, the naïveté, the manipulativeness, and the hurtfulness in Roxane's behavior, and, like Cyrano, you forgive her all of it. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/12/07.) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

PETER AND JERRY
Edward Albee has expanded his 1958 drama "Zoo Story." (Reviewed in this issue.) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

THE RECEPTIONIST
The playwright Adam Bock finds laughter but also a cloudy, ominous threat in the office setting. Under Joe Mantello's direction (and thanks to David Korins's terrific set) it's all there—the telephones, the closed doors, the person "away from her desk"—but the sixty-five-minute play, for all its early briskness and late creepiness, seems to have left out a final scene. As recompense, four enthusiastic actors carry the script, and Jayne Houdyshell, who owns the stage in her role as the gossipy, nosy, and underemployed receptionist, is alarmingly human and vulnerable. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ROCK 'N' ROLL
A synaptic jam session covering everything from Václav Havel to Pink Floyd, Tom Stoppard's latest work tracks the parallel lives of Max (Brian Cox), a staunchly Marxist Cambridge professor, and Jan (Rufus Sewell), his Czech protégé, whose career as a dissident is tethered to his love of rock—specifically, the underground band the Plastic People of the Universe. As in "The Coast of Utopia," to which this play might be seen as a coda, Stoppard uses the stage as an ideological sounding board, plotting the convictions of his characters against the inexorable sweep of time. If the play (a London transfer, directed by Trevor Nunn) only occasionally matches the emotional

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heat of the music it samples, it nevertheless makes for a dazzling set of liner notes. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

SPAIN
Jilted by her husband of five years, Barbara (Annabella Sciorra) hangs around the apartment in pajama pants, dreaming of a storybook Spain, until her fantasy is hijacked by her own hallucination—a swarthy conquistador with a handlebar mustache (Michael Aronov). His proud description of the rape and slaughter of "savages" stirs Barbara's repressed bloodlust; suddenly, she's reaching for a sword to kill her ex-husband. Or is she? The playwright, Jim Knable, aims for a nouveau "Don Quixote," but he gets tangled up in pop psychology and a police procedural on the way to the windmills. The result, briskly directed by Jeremy Dobrish, advances by dint of Sciorra's unflagging energy and by comedic injections from Lisa Kron (in a series of punchy bit parts) and Veanne Cox, as Barbara's uptight friend. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. Through Nov. 17.)

THINGS WE WANT
Jonathan Marc Sherman's lacklustre drama, produced by the New Group and directed by Ethan Hawke, concerns three brothers who convene in the apartment from which both of their parents jumped to their deaths. As the play opens, Teddy (Josh Hamilton) is following a self-help guru named Dr. Miracle, Sty (Peter Dinklage) is a raging alcoholic, and Charles (Paul Dano), the youngest, has just quit cooking school because his girlfriend quit him. Sty sets Charles up with a lovely young woman in the building, Stella (Zoe Kazan), a recovered alcoholic. The reversals in the second act do wonders for these terrific actors—all of whom take great advantage of the chance to show their range—but little for the story, an exploration of selfishness and loss that crucially lacks depth. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN
Mel Brooks has adapted his 1974 film into a musical. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **A BRONX TALE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DIE MOMMIE DIE!:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **GONE MISSING:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **HAMLET:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **JUMP:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-4100. **MARGARET CHO'S THE SENSUOUS WOMAN:** Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-352-3101. Through Nov. 17. **NONE OF THE ABOVE:** Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **THE OVERWHELMING:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **PYGMALION:** American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **THE RITZ:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **SPEECH & DEBATE:** Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

APOLLO THEATRE
253 W. 125th St. (212-531-5300)—Nov. 16: **Spiritualized.** The brainchild of the Spacemen3 leader, Jason Pierce, this band, from the Midlands of England, is renowned for drone-laden psychedelic music. It has not released a new record in four years (though it has one due out next year), and this tour finds Pierce revisiting both Spiritualized's back catalogue and Spacemen3's work with acoustic guitars, strings, and gospel singers.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Nov. 14: The **Easy Star All-Stars** perform reggae versions of songs by Pink Floyd and Radiohead, along with originals. The opening act is Victor Axelrod, a member of the All-Stars (as well as the up-and-coming R. & B. band the Dap-Kings) who also goes by the name **Ticklah.** He's celebrating the release of "Ticklah vs. Axelrod," his new solo album of sweetly solipsistic island rhythms. Nov. 16: The **Subdudes,** a New Orleans-based R. &. B.-and-rock ensemble with a reputation for sensational live shows. Nov. 18: **Suffocation,** a local band that's been stomping around the death-metal community since the early nineties, is joined by **Immolation** and **Skinless,** two groups with similar inclinations.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 18: The **Bird and the Bee** are Inara George, a singer (and the daughter of the late Little Feat leader, Lowell George), and Greg Kurstin, a producer and keyboardist who has worked with everyone from the Flaming Lips to Beck. The pair come from Los Angeles, where they've been perfecting a smooth pop sound that's indebted to vintage bossa nova, sixties girl-group music, and contemporary hip-hop. Nov. 19: **Shonen Knife,** the prototypical cult band, is a feverishly beloved trio of Japanese women who play sugary, childlike pop and rudimentary punk rock.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 15: **Malajube,** from Montreal, plays epic indie rock that's a tad more sophisticated than that of its celebrated hometown peers; its songs are in French. Its latest album is "Trompe-l'Oeil." Nov. 16: The **Electric Six** takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to its jittery dance rock. Nov. 17: **Jesse Malin,** the former front man for the glam rockers D Generation, has grown up to become an accomplished songwriter with more than a few good stories to tell. Nov. 18: The Canadian roots-rapper **Buck 65.**

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Nov. 14: The tenacious band **Papa Roach** has outlived the rap-rock boom that first won it its success at the start of the decade. In the wake of the backlash against its chosen subgenre, the band, much like the insect from which it takes part of its name, has evolved and now favors more traditional hard rock. Nov. 16: The gritty Texan singer-songwriter **Robert Earl Keen.**

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Nov. 17: The jam band **Donna the Buffalo,** the gospel-tinged ensemble **Ollabelle,** and others perform for the benefit of the Rex Foundation, a legacy of the Grateful Dead that specializes in grass-roots giving.

HILL COUNTRY
30 W. 26th St. (212-255-4544)—Nov. 17: Despite being dubbed the inheritors of the Texas sound by the Lone Star legend Doug Sahm (no small feat in Austin, a city brimming with aspirants), the **Gourds** have a sensibility decidedly different from that of the late honky-tonk and blues master. They may share Sahm's affinity for raucous accordion breakdowns and countrified rock explorations, but they channel those influences into a whimsical style all their own.

HIRO BALLROOM
The Maritime Hotel, 371 W. 16th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 15: The renegade cowgirl **Shelby Lynne's** early career in Nashville yielded half a dozen CDs of pedestrian country pop, but she changed direction for her album "I Am Shelby Lynne," in 2000. Its caterwauling back-porch blues and Memphis horns suggested Al Green at the Grand Ole Opry and earned her a Grammy (for Best New Artist, ironically). Here, she'll be previewing material from her forthcoming album of songs made popular by Dusty Springfield, "Just a Little Lovin'."

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—Nov. 17: The madmen in **Enon** bridge the gap between clever indie rock and experimental noise. Their quirky, hard-edged pop is rife with squeaks, buzzes, electronic hisses, and other found sounds.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 19-20: The stellar Brazilian singer-songwriter **Caetano Veloso.**

RODEO BAR
375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (212-683-6500)—Nov. 17: The **Incredible Casuals,** a long-running Cape Cod bar band piloted by the ever-entertaining Chandler Travis, touches down for its first New York City show in some two decades.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Nov. 16: **Don McLean,** the man who gave the world the durable pop standard "American Pie." Nov. 17-18: The barbed folk of **Ani DiFranco.**

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Nov. 14: **Kevin Drew,** one of the founders of the bounding Canadian ensemble Broken Social Scene, drops by with songs from his compelling solo album of dishevelled, honest pop, "Spirit If . . ." Nov. 17: The **Avett Brothers** are two siblings from North Carolina, the guitarist Seth and the banjo player Scott, and a bassist, Bob Crawford. The trio sings, shouts, and plays with abandon, injecting new life into timeless roots music.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Starting Nov. 13: **Andrea Marcovicci** relies on a surplus of charm, wit, and insider knowledge; here, she performs a program of the imperishable songs of Rodgers and Hart.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 14-17: The guitarist and singer **John Pizzarelli** teamed up with a big band for his recent album, "Dear Mr. Sinatra." Here, he's backed by his quartet for a tribute to the legendary vocalist. Pizzarelli may not have the magisterial style of Ol' Blue Eyes, but he shares a sense of unerring swing and well-honed good taste.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 13-16: The vocalist **Cassandra Wilson** (see also the Café Sabarsky, below) has the talent, charisma, and power to mix blues, folk, popular song, and jazz into a hybrid all her own.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Dec. 31: The singer **Steve Tyrell** hits town to turn on the holiday charm. Expect tunes from his popular release "This Time of the Year," from 2002, as well as from his forthcoming album, "Back to Bacharach."

CAFÉ SABARSKY
Neue Galerie, Fifth Ave. at 86th St. (212-628-6200, ext. 485)—Carnegie Hall's "Berlin in Lights" festival has set up a second stage here this month. Nov. 15: The versatile and adventurous vocalist **Theo Bleckmann.** Nov. 17: **Cassandra Wilson.** As a jazz singer who has successfully integrated tunes by the likes of the Monkees and Robert Johnson into her repertoire, Wilson will have a field day with Brecht, Weill, and other denizens of the Weimar-era cabaret scene.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 13-18: The pianist **Mulgrew Miller,** one of the most in-demand sidemen of his generation, stops by with his ensemble Wingspan, which features the vibraphonist **Steve Nelson** and the saxophonist **Steve Wilson.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Nov. 24: The stage-and-screen legend **Chita Rivera.**

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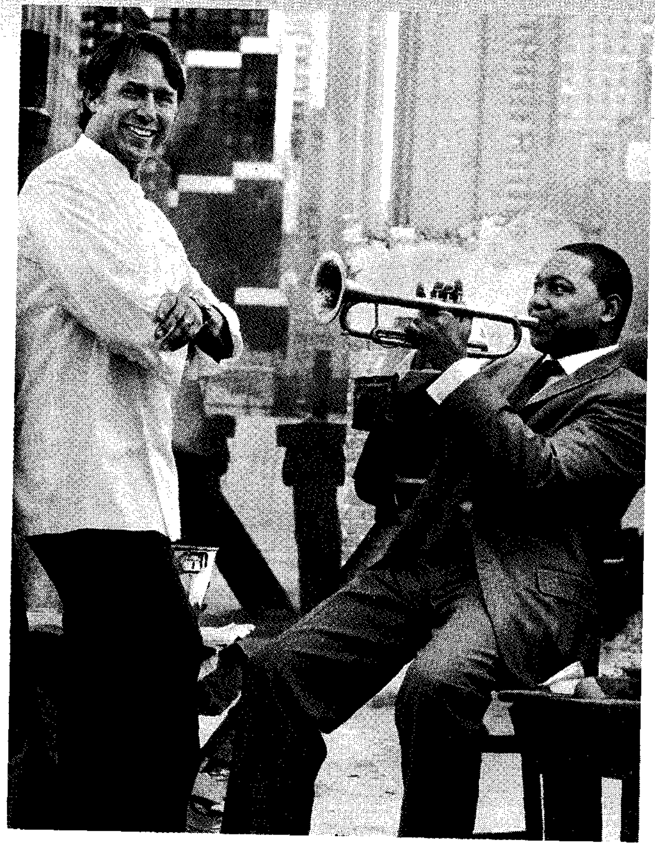

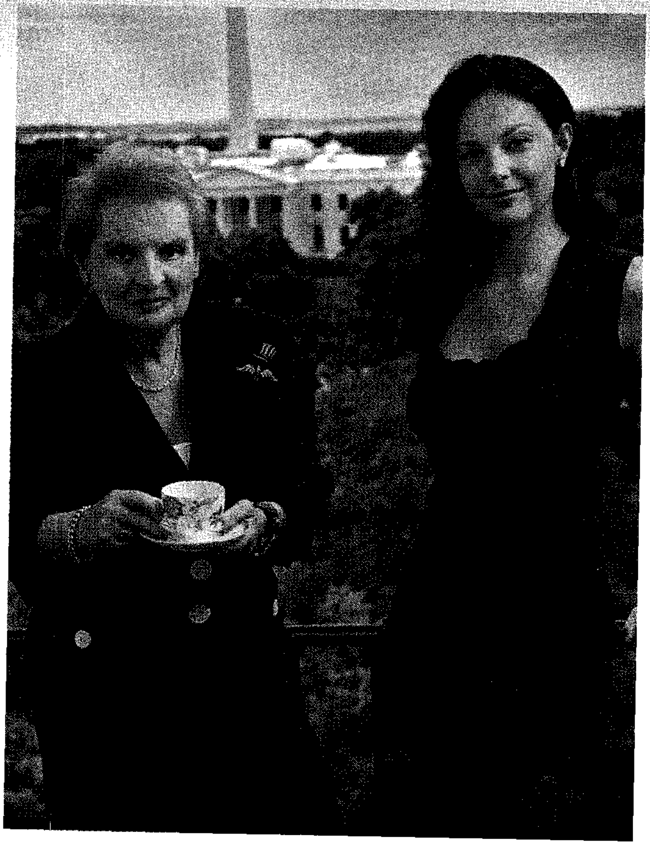

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thursday, november 29

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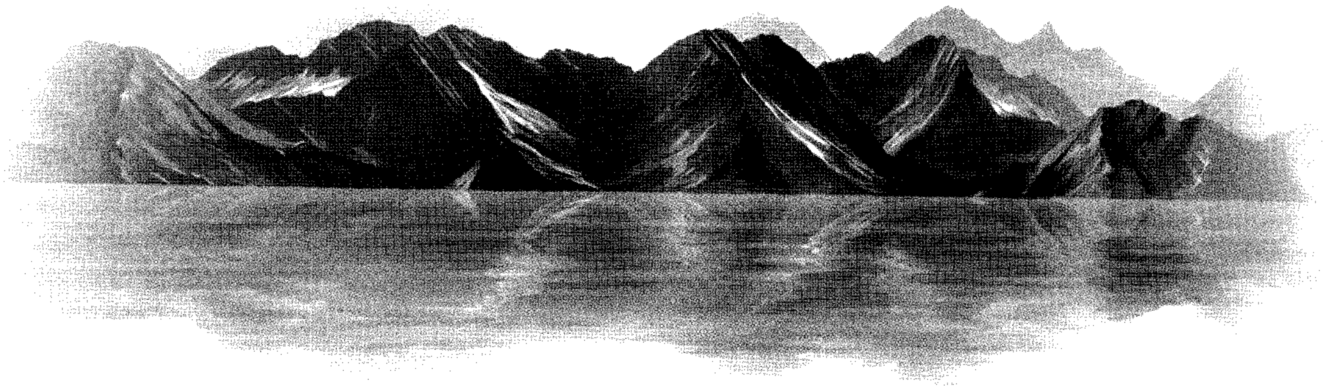

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HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ

Nov. 15: The "Keepers of the Flame" concert unites exemplary representatives of mainstream jazz, with the singer **Carol Sloane** and the pianists **Norman Simmons, Bill Charlap,** and **Victor Lin.** (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460.)

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Nov. 17-18: The vocalist **Sheila Jordan** and the trombonist **Roswell Rudd,** who first joined musical forces on the 1974 album "Flexible Flyer," reunite to celebrate their respective seventy-ninth and seventy-second birthdays. Another "Flexible Flyer" alumnus, the masterful drummer **Barry Altschul,** joins them. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 13-18: The star saxophonist **Joe Lovano** presents a new band, Us Five, featuring the pianist **James Weidman,** the bassist **Esperanza Spalding,** and the heft of both a drummer (**Otis Brown**) and a second percussionist (**Francisco Mela**). The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

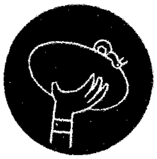
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Age of Rembrandt."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ **"Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ **"Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary."** Through March 2, 2008. ♦ **"The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti's Renaissance Masterpiece."** Through Jan. 13, 2008. ♦ **"Gifts for the Gods: Images from Egyptian Temples"** samples two millennia of metal statuary, most of it modestly scaled and remarkably well-preserved. From the Old Kingdom age (ca. 2575-2100 B.C.) to the Ptolemaic period (ca. 664-30 B.C.), Egyptian smithery evolved to include complex feats of casting, chasing, and inlay. Stellar examples of late works here include a solid copper cast of the ram-headed god Seth, with curving horns and a double crown, and a devotional effigy of the priestess Takushit, hollow-cast in copper, wearing a gown inlaid with glinting hieroglyphics of gold wire. Through Feb. 18, 2008. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Martin Puryear"** convenes forty-seven vigorously crafted, poetically imaginative works made since the early seventies, mostly in wood, by the consistently excellent American sculptor, whose independent course—rejecting the taciturnity of minimalism while applying its aesthetic insights—has denied him the deserved fame that, at last, may be his. Puryears are one-of-a-kind charms, mysterious and friendly. Small ones have staunch authority; big ones are as intimate as whispers. A colossal new piece—a wheeled wagon of faceted lumber, with a soaring wagon tongue sixty feet long—makes MOMA's space-wasting atrium seem artistically utile, for a change. Through Jan. 14, 2008. ♦ **"Georges Seurat: The Drawings,"** a thrilling and exhausting encounter with radical beauty, clarifies the short-lived artist's monumental revamping of pictorial space. Massy darks and filmy lights, in black conté crayon on textured paper, transpose visual weights and measures from three dimensions to two, abolishing Renaissance perspective in pictures of people and places that are easy to look at but impossible to really understand, what with their concatenating double effects of illusion and objectness, image and stuff, and grace and crudity. Especially in earlyish works, from before "La Grande Jatte" and increasing stylization, Seurat plays hob with the automatic processing of sight in the brain, inducing a salutary aesthetic panic. Through Jan. 7, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO

TAÏM

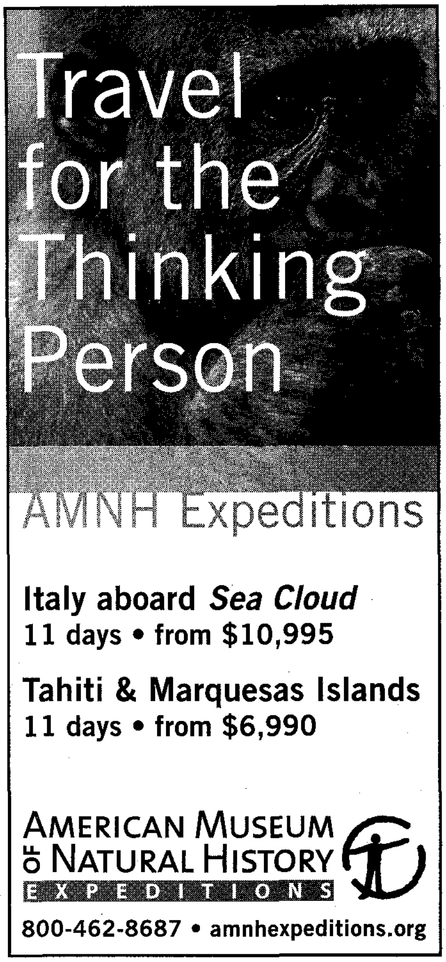


222 Waverly Pl. (212-691-1287)—When a restaurateur with crossover dreams tries to make gourmet food "street," the trick can seem cynical: at Spice Market, his take on the cuisine of Southeast-Asian peddlers, for instance, Jean-Georges Vongerichten reaches into his hat and pulls out a spring roll for nine-fifty. But "take street food, and make it gourmet," as Einat Admony, the chef at Taïm, a falafel shop in the West Village, says she aims to do, and the result is elating. Her gussied-up chickpeas feel like a steal to the same degree that Vongerichten's dressed-down lobster feels like a cheat.

Admony, a veteran of a million venerable kitchens around the city, met Stefan Nafziger, her co-owner and husband, in 2001. She was working at Danube; he was a manager at Bouley. When they decided, two years ago, to go out on their own, the idea was to recall the beloved snacks of her native Tel Aviv without sacrificing technique. And so there they are every day, jammed into a three-hundred-square-foot storefront (that *includes* the kitchen), chopping parsley for tabbouleh, grinding spices, slicing potatoes for their excellent homemade French fries. (Dip them in the saffron aioli and acknowledge the inadequacy of ketchup once and forever.) Admony makes her own harissa, a Tunisian chile-pepper paste that spices up Taïm's most popular falafel. Also on offer are "red," with roasted red pepper, and "green," flavored with parsley, mint, and cilantro. They're both a go. Israeli salad—dud order, right? Not here: a lemon-mint dressing braces the mild vegetables, and the tomatoes, miraculously, are never mealy or pink. The pitas, made by a guy in Brooklyn, are toasted on the stove, to induce a crust, and served hot as can be. Admony brushes them with olive oil and a mixture of sesame, salt, and zatar, an herb that grows on a mountain near Jerusalem.

Admony also makes smoothies, which is a bit like pointing out that Michael Jordan played basketball, too. Most nights she mans the blender, dumping pre-apportioned ingredients from plastic ramekins and bags. (You get the feeling that she spends a lot of time at the Container Store.) For a date-banana drink, a familiar combination in Israel, she adds lime to cut the sweetness; another mixes strawberries, raspberries, and Thai basil. The line out the door is done the American way. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Dishes $3.25-$9.50.)

—*Lauren Collins*



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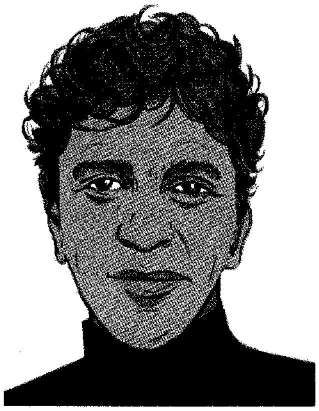
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CAETANO TIME

Had Caetano Veloso just aged gracefully, it would have been enough. Had he merely written thirty or so perfect songs, it would have been enough. Had he only recorded "Cê," one of the most striking and least indulgent rock records of 2007, it would have been enough. But on top of all that there's the fact that when he comes to New York, he gets to play to that crowd, *his* crowd. When he appears at the Nokia Theatre Nov. 19-20, there may be more young audience members than usual, thanks to "Cê," which Veloso recorded with three musicians in their twenties and thirties, who will also appear with him. But every Veloso show also brings out a core of Brazilian nationals who are in for the long haul. When Veloso performs older songs like "Sampa" or the gorgeous "O Homem Velho," the air will fill with the sound of a thousand voices singing along in Portuguese. If anyone's bothered to sit down, they'll soon be back on their feet. Watch Veloso or watch the crowd—sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.



—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Richard Prince: Spiritual America."** Through Jan. 8, 2008. ♦ **"Foto: Modernity in Central Europe."** Through Jan. 13, 2008. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love."** Through Feb. 3, 2008. ♦ **"Piotr Uklanski: Summer Love."** Through Dec. 9. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. ♦ **"Brushed with Light: American Landscape Watercolors from the Collection."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Water: H_2O=Life."** Through May 26, 2008. ♦ **"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ For the next eight months, around five hundred specimens will flit through the Butterfly Conservatory, a pocket-size hothouse planted with orchids and other rain-forest flora. Through May 26, 2008. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig."** Through Mar. 16, 2008. ♦ **"Camille Pissarro: Impressions of City and Country."** Through Feb. 3, 2008. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Painted with Words: Vincent van Gogh's Letters to Émile Bernard."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Senso Unico"** surveys the work of eight contemporary Italian artists, including Vanessa Beecroft, Adrian Paci, Paola Pivi, and Francesco Vezzoli. Through Jan. 7, 2008. ♦ **"Fassbinder: Berlin Alexanderplatz."** Through Jan. 7, 2008. ♦ **"Kathe Burkhart."** Ferocious paintings of Elizabeth Taylor, their images cribbed from publicity photos, are encrusted with fake fur and mirrors and peppered with a sailor's arsenal of expletives. Burkhart's Liz is an abject diva, an emblem of a decadent golden age, and a serial bride who disavows premarital sex—in short, a gorgeous mess. Photographs of nude sunbathers on the beach in Europe and a video that plays off the myth of Persephone head in a different direction, toward a permissive pastoral world in which Hollywood glamour, mixed with frustration and rage, feels continents away. Through Jan. 7, 2008. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Jacob Lawrence's 'Migration' Series: Selections from the Phillips Collection."** Opens Nov. 14. ♦ **"Kori Newkirk: 1997-2007."** Opens Nov. 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

LALLA ESSAYDI
For the large, unframed color photographs in the series called "Les Femmes du Maroc," the Moroccan-born artist riffs on nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings and ethnographic photos by placing burka-clad women in stripped-down domestic settings, stylized versions of the only spaces that Arab females can claim for themselves. Every available surface within these images, including all visible skin, has been covered with Islamic calligraphy in henna—a run-on text that reads as both manic stitchery and as the subjects' suppressed thoughts made visible. Essaydi uses a furiously decorated layer of artifice to suggest the rich, vivid lives it disguises. Through Nov. 21. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070.)

SIMON NORFOLK
The British photographer's large color images are photojournalism at its most artful and art at its most engaged. Although he describes the unpopulated landscapes in his new show as battlefields, just one—a palm-studded resort in Lebanon with a burning power station in the distance—betrays any overt sign of conflict. Others, from Afghanistan, Israel, the Hebrides, and the border between the U.S. and Mexico, telegraph only the subtlest signs of tension in otherwise serene, often beautiful vistas. Also here are a series of startling pictures of the huge, circular components of a supercollider in Switzerland that look like sci-fi mandalas or psychedelic kaleidoscope views. Through Nov. 24. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

Short List

PHILIP GUSTON/JASPER JOHNS: Castelli, 18 E. 77th St. 212-249-4470. Through Dec. 22. **FAZAL SHEIKH:** Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through Nov. 24. **CHRISTOPHER WOOL:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through Dec. 15.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DIANA AL-HADID
The twenty-six-year-old Syrian-born artist makes her New York solo début with a single work: a room-size sculpture that evokes both religious relic and stage set. A wood-and-metal framework joins mismatched architectural elements made of plaster to the guts of an organ and an outsized gramophone horn; a grand, decrepit staircase sweeps up toward jagged peaks of broken columns; a tarry puddle has collected underneath. There's a flash of Petah Coyne in the elegant decay, a touch of Piranesi in the structural fancy. The crystalline visual cacophony whets the appetite for more. Through Nov. 21. (Rubenstein, 534 W. 24th St. 212-627-8000.)

FOLKERT DE JONG
Picasso lives in de Jong's quirky, folksy, vaguely religious sculptures—particularly the early, Rose-period Picasso who identified with the itinerant European circus acrobats called *saltimbanques.* De Jong's colorful Styrofoam-and-polyurethane-foam installation re-creates figures from the Spanish painter's 1905 canvas "Family of Saltimbanques" and arranges them in tableaux. Some suggest nativity scenes, others pyramids of cheerleaders. It's hard to say whether the ideal viewer of the show would be a Picasso fanatic or a carnival aficionado—while de Jong's sculptural chops are strong, his tone is often overly dramatic and kitschy. Through Nov. 24. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

DAVID DUPUIS
Elaborate drawings are filled with collaged skulls (all the rage in art this season) and eyes, and dense, concentric rings of colored pencil. Some make a link between the body and landscape, others are portraits (John F. Kennedy, Jr., crops up as a subject). Stylistic references hopscotch from Japanese Edo-period fabrics to folkloric religious icons to portraiture. A selection of self-portraits, made during a period in which the artist drew one a day, fall somewhere between the product of a life-drawing class and a contemporary channelling of Frida Kahlo. Through Nov. 17. (Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411.)

AMY GARTRELL
"Function Creep" is the title of this show, in which familiar items are subjected to witty interferences. Stalactites cling to the underside of a water-stained

RACHEL DOMM

card table; a compatibility chart is overlaid with gilt Rorschach blots; stained-glass flames are backlit by a computer monitor. The *Wunderkammer* vibe is strongest in a three-tiered, rotating display case filled with shells, crystals, and a fossilized cell phone. If the show feels a bit flimsy and diffuse, it may be because Gartrell is in transition, moving past the adolescent ardency that marked previous efforts. There's a new maturity emerging that promises richer work to come. Through Nov. 24. (Reich, 537A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949.)

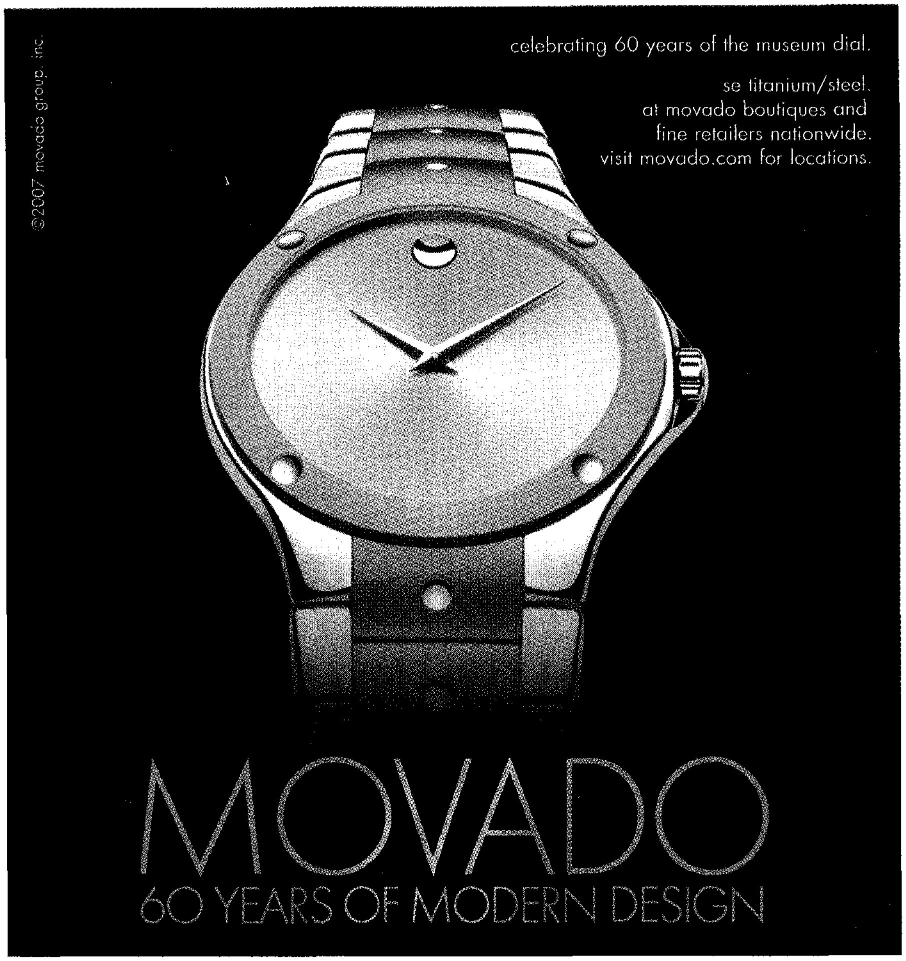
ISAAC JULIEN
An elliptical narrative of displacement and desire, Julien's multiscreen installation "Western Union: Small Boats" centers on themes familiar in his work—beautiful men enacting silent rituals of threat and courtship, landscapes and interiors photographed like beloved bodies. The setting is a Sicilian seaside village, Agrigento, where fishing boats drift, crowded with "clandestines" from North Africa. Two young men languish in the boats and roll in the dust on the hills; a mysterious woman watches from the decaying portico of Palazzo Gangi (where Visconti filmed "The Leopard"). Through Nov. 17. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

YISHAI JUSIDMAN
The Economist adorns its news roundup "The World This Week" with photographs; the world's weeks being what they are, these frequently depict conflagrations. The Mexican artist appropriates a handful of these thumbnail images for his series "The Economist Shuffle," rendering them as Old Masters-ish oil-and-egg-tempera paintings on wood panels, in gold frames. A rioter in a green hoodie flings a Molotov cocktail; a helicopter circles a plume of smoke. In such company, other scenes—a smoker exhaling in silhouette, a beer belly in a loud shirt—look equally ominous. Through Nov. 18. (Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ
After the death of his wife, Elizabeth, in 1977, Kertész spent a lot of time in the apartment overlooking Washington Square Park that they'd shared. It was there, until his own death, in 1985, that he made these wonderful SX-70 color Polaroids. Working in a small scale but with the same wit and agility that characterized all his photographs (see the fine selection in the back gallery), he made some portraits and some views over nearby rooftops, but mostly he made still-lifes, many on a windowsill looking out at the sky. Intimate, resonant, and surprisingly tender, these may not be Kertész's strongest images, but they're among his most soulful. Through Nov. 24. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN
Appropriation gets a sophisticated, personalized twist in Lichtenstein's show. It is bookended by a wall of rephotographed pictures of airplanes and a video pairing the soundtrack from the film "Picnic at Hanging Rock" (the main character is a girl named Miranda) with footage of the artist in a century-old frock picking her way through a mossy landscape. In between are photographs that channel the ghosts of Victorian photography—and perhaps a few ghosts themselves in her self-portraits as a shaman and an apparition behind a stroboscopic dream machine. What the show adds up to is less important than realizing that all images exist as fleeting, flickering fragments. Through Nov. 24. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

KATE SHEPHERD
At first glance, these understated, multipanel paintings look chilly and diagrammatic, like screen savers. But give them a minute and they begin to warm. Shepherd coats her wooden panels with uniform mirrorlike enamel, mostly midnight or charcoal, occasionally red, orange, or Kelly green. Across these glossy surfaces are feathered pale-gray lines, rendered in oil, that stand out against the enamel like chalk on slate. Contoured grids emerge, hinting at ocean waves, vertical sheets of rain, and spidery webs, bathing Shepherd's latter-day minimalism in memory and mood. Through Nov. 24. (Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470.)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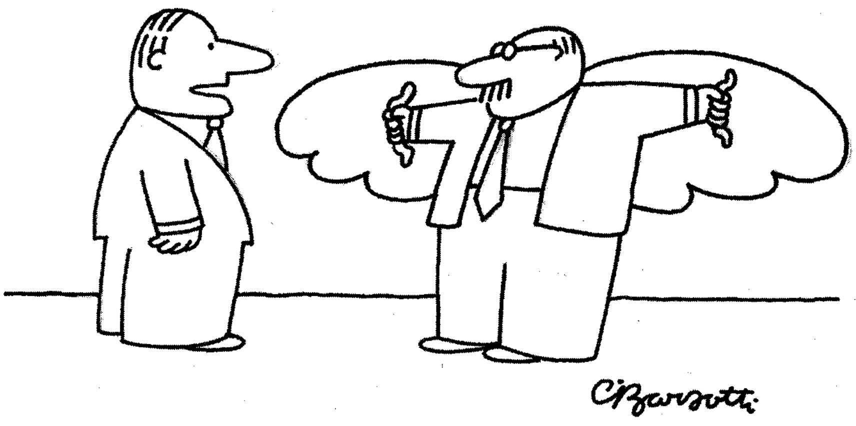

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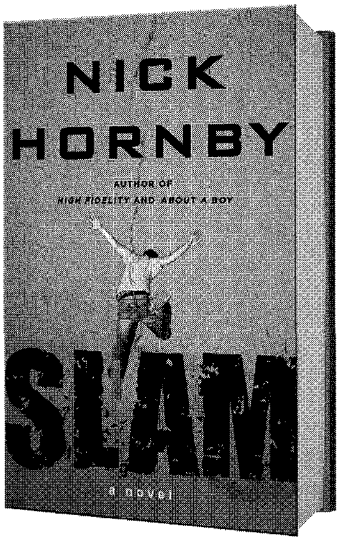

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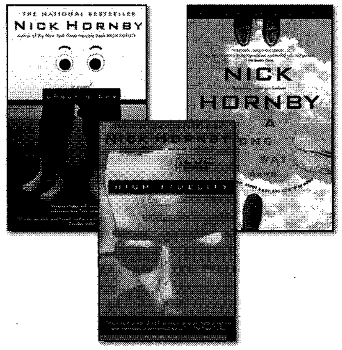

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AARON SPANGLER
Spangler's black-painted pieces, four reliefs and one freestanding sculpture carved from basswood, have roughened surfaces that give them the visual heft of bronze. His compositions are intricate and deft—in his hands a discarded pop-top looks as timeless as a twist of tree roots. The show's centerpiece is a twelve-foot-long relief that mingles rural and martial elements: farm buildings and tools, a sword, a tank as riddled with holes as a piece of Swiss cheese. The talismanic profusion of forms could be a proposal for a new American currency. Through Nov. 24. (Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700.)

KARA WALKER
This show of new work, a complement to Walker's mid-career retrospective at the Whitney Museum, finds the artist branching out. The signature cut-paper silhouettes are here, titled after a rambling historical record, documenting violence against freed slaves during Reconstruction. But instead of Walker's customary black, the silhouettes are green, red, and brown—some placed against an abstract geometric pattern, like the ones found in quilts. A grid of texts culled from the artist's diary, a catalogue of epithets and atrocities, finds the artist expanding thematically, too. Rather than focussing solely on the legacy of American slavery, Walker confronts viewers with the sordid truth: brutality rages worldwide. Through Nov. 21. (Sikkema Jenkins & Co., 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

SIMON ROBERTS
In 2004, the British artist set out on a yearlong trek across Russia, taking pictures in more than two hundred locales. A selection of these photographs—from an abandoned warship in Murmansk to a bustling outdoor market in Chechnya—make up the inaugural exhibition at Klompching. Through Dec. 23. (111 Front St. 212-796-2070.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
"The Nutcracker" is just around the corner, but first comes the opening-night gala, dedicated to Lincoln Kirstein, who co-founded the company with Balanchine in 1948. Peter Martins has made a ballet for the occasion, "Grazioso," a pas de quatre set to music by the Russian composer Mikhail Glinka, in which the company will show off its wonderful, newly imported dancer Gonzalo Garcia. Dancers will also perform "The Rose Adagio" and Balanchine's "Garland Dance," both from "Sleeping Beauty," as well as Christopher Wheeldon's mystical pas de deux "Liturgy." Clips from a new film about Jerome Robbins's exploration of nineteen-fifties youth culture, "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz," will round out the evening. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Nov. 20 at 7. Through Feb. 24.)

"LINCOLN KIRSTEIN: ALCHEMIST"
In the Vincent Astor gallery at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, a compact, informative free exhibit illustrates Kirstein's vast achievements and includes performance photographs, film footage, set design and masks by Noguchi for Balanchine's "Orpheus," and Maria Tallchief's gorgeous beaded headdress from "Firebird." (212-870-1630. Through Jan. 30.)

BATSHEVA DANCE COMPANY
There are no mirrors in Ohad Naharin's studios. This inward-directing requirement partially accounts for what's most appealing and distinctive about his troupe—the dancers' affect (call it earnestly quirky). That quality, combined with superlegible execution, makes the tripartite "Three" vivid, even when the choreography gets fuzzy. Whether Bach or Brian Eno, the music is mostly there to be worked against, and the pursuit of unpredictability leads to outcomes that are alternately thrilling and tiresome. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Nov. 13 and Nov. 15-17 at 7:30.)

COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET
Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson's strong, sexy troupe brings two programs to the Joyce. The first is a repertory sampler, combining a new Rhoden piece (set to Chopin) and his Nina Simone suite with works by Nicolo Fonte, Abdur Jackson, and William Forsythe. "The Peace Project" brings together the choreographic efforts of company members, Rhoden's 9/11-inspired "White," and a new mother-son duet for the ageless Carmen De Lavallade and the extraordinary Richardson. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 13-14 at 7:30, Nov. 15 at 7, Nov. 16 at 8, Nov. 17 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 18 at 2 and 7:30. Through Nov. 25.)

THE PENNSYLVANIA BALLET
This Philadelphia-based ballet company, founded in 1963, is back in New York for its first visit since 1985. The ensemble will present two programs, each of which includes a work by Balanchine: "Serenade" and "Concerto Barocco." In addition, it brings the popular African-dance-inspired joyride "Lambarena," by Val Caniparoli, and two works by its own Matthew Neenan—a reimagined "Carmina Burana" and "As It's Going." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Nov. 14-15 at 7:30, Nov. 16 at 8, Nov. 17 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 18 at 2.)

FAUSTIN LINYEKULA
"Festival of Lies," the Congolese choreographer's New York début, turns Brooklyn's BRICstudio into an African social club, complete with food, libations, and an Afro-pop groove by the Brooklyn-based band Asiko. The context is festive, but the message—and the presentation—are bleak. To the sound of propaganda, Linyekula and his affectless crew move fluorescent light tubes around, arrange each other's limbs and faces like mannequins, and compile doll parts, which they toss around near the end of a long, drawn-out performance. You might need a drink. (647 Fulton St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 14-17 at 8.)

"OAK SACRE"
Beppie Blankert and Bianca van Dillen, two Dutch modern-dance pioneers, have created a pair of dances—"Oak," by Blankert, and "Sacre," by van Dillen—inspired by Bach's Brandenburg Concertos and Stravinsky's "Dumbarton Oaks" and "Rite of Spring." The normally literary Blankert has changed modes, exploring abstraction; van Dillen traces the story of the sacrificial victim in Stravinsky's "Rite." (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Nov. 15-17 at 8:30.)

"TAPEIRE"
The Irish step dancer James Devine's new show continues its run. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Nov. 16 and Nov. 20 at 7, Nov. 17 at 2 and 7, and Nov. 18 at noon and 5. Through Nov. 25.)

"THE RITE OF SPRING PROJECT"
Carnegie Hall's "Berlin in Lights" festival culminates with this large-scale venture by the Berlin Philharmonic, in collaboration with the city's public schools. The project began with the creation of a musical work based on Stravinsky's 1913 ballet; the British choreographer Royston Maldoom then composed a massive dance work, set to Stravinsky's original score. The new dance will be performed by a hundred students aged seven to eighteen from four schools, with the accompaniment of the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Simon Rattle. (United Palace, 4140 Broadway, at 175th St. 212-247-7800. Nov. 17 at 7 and Nov. 18 at 3.)

YVONNE RAINER
In her recent return to choreography, Rainer, who renounced the past and gave postmodern dance its name, has taken an interest in the canon. First it was Balanchine's "Agon"; now, with "RoS Indexical" (part of the Performa 07 biennial), it's the Stravinsky/Nijinsky "Rite of Spring." As a BBC reënactment of the notorious first performance plays, boos and all, a quartet of veterans (Sally Silvers, Pat Catterson, Emily Coates, and Patricia Hoffbauer) do a little Nijinsky, a little Rainer, some slapstick. In sneakers and workout clothes, they take a break on a couch, chug water, chat. It isn't quite satire, and it isn't homage, and it's not likely to cause a riot. (Hudson Theatre, 145 W. 44th St. 212-768-4400. Nov. 18-19 at 7.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The house's enduring production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro"** will be beefed up by the arrival of two superlative singers: Bryn Terfel (Figaro) and Simon Keenlyside (Count Almaviva). Also featuring the estimable Anja Harteros and Ekaterina Siurina; Philippe Jordan, an elegant young Mozartean, leads the orchestra. (Nov. 14 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 1.) ♦ Renée Fleming revisits the role of opera's favorite kept woman—Violetta—in Zeffirelli's fulsome production of **"La Traviata."** Fleming may not always have the impeccable musical taste to go with her luxe soprano, but she is moving as a complex, cynical woman who fights a losing battle for her version of happiness—whether she finds it in a man or a glass of champagne. Matthew Polenzani, so sterling in Mozart, is a little out of place at the party as Violetta's lover Alfredo. Also with Dwayne Croft; Marco Armiliato conducts with care. (Nov. 15 at 8.) ♦ The Met's **"Norma,"** designed originally as a vehicle for Jane Eaglen, is saddled with a lumbering production, but that will hardly deter the bel-canto enthusiasts who flock to Bellini's best-known opera. The impressive Armenian soprano Hasmik Papian now takes the title role, countered by the formidable Dolora Zajick as Adalgisa. Also with Franco Farina and Vitalij Kowaljow; Maurizio Benini. (Nov. 16 and Nov. 19 at 8.) ♦ Julie Taymor's production of **"Die Zauberflöte,"** with Diana Damrau, Anna-Kristiina Kaappola, Joseph Kaiser, and Stéphane Degout; Kirill Petrenko. (Nov. 17 at 8.) ♦ In a rare feat, Damrau, a radiant and agile lyric soprano (and a house favorite) who had settled into the role of Pamina, replaces Kaappola as the Queen of the Night; Genia Kühmeier is the new Pamina. (Nov. 20 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Samuel Barber's **"Vanessa"**—one of his loveliest creations—is an American "Adriana Lecouvreur," a work of supple lyricism and gentle beauty with a lead role (created by Eleanor Steber at the Met in 1958) that is a gift to mature sopranos. In City Opera's reverent new production, Lauren Flanigan tempers her volatile style to deliver one of her most elegant performances. Katharine Goeldner (as Erika), Ryan MacPherson, and Richard Stilwell sing with convincing style; the great Rosalind Elias, Barber's first Erika, sings the role of the Old Baroness with a dignity and weight that keeps everyone honest. Anne Manson's conducting emphasizes the more angular aspects of the score. (Nov. 14 at 7:30 and Nov. 17 at 1:30.) ♦ The fiery Beth Clayton takes the title role in **"Carmen,"** heading a cast that also features Julianne Borg, Scott Piper, and Michael Chioldi; Brian Garman conducts. (Nov. 15 and Nov. 17 at 8.) ♦ City Opera's powder-pink production of Massenet's **"Cendrillon,"** directed by Renaud Doucet and designed by André Barbe, tells a deliciously tart version of the Cinderella story in an exaggerated nineteen-fifties setting. The role of Cinderella is sweetly sung by Cassandre Berthon, heading a cast that also features Joyce Castle, Frédéric Antoun (as Prince Charming), and Eugene Brancoveanu; George Manahan savors the score's richness. (Nov. 16 at 8 and Nov. 18 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500. These are the final performances of the fall season.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The vocalist Barbara Cook returns to the scene of her triumph in the Philharmonic's 1985 concert presentation of Sondheim's "Follies" to offer two solo concerts of classic American songs; Lee Musiker leads the orchestra. (Nov. 19-20 at 7:30.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

CARNEGIE HALL: "BERLIN IN LIGHTS"
Clive Gillinson, the hall's general director, has arranged a mammoth festival in honor of the rejuvenated city. This week's concerts by Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic—pairing new pieces by major composers with late works by Mahler—are merely the foundation for a broad schedule of events. For full listing, see www.carnegiehall.org. Nov. 13 at 8: In its first concert at Stern Auditorium, the U.S. première of Magnus Lindberg's "Seht die Sonne" precedes Mahler's Symphony No. 9. ♦ Nov. 14 at 8: Another American première—of Thomas Adès's "Tevot"—is followed by a performance of "Das Lied von der Erde," featuring the tenor Ben Heppner and the baritone Thomas Quasthoff. ♦ Nov. 16 at 8: Deryck Cooke's "performing version" of Mahler's unfinished Symphony No. 10—a longtime Rattle specialty—is preceded by "Stele," a rare orchestral work by the enigmatic Hungarian master György Kurtág. ♦ Nov. 17 at 7 and Nov. 18 at 3: In an extraordinary program, Berlin's orchestra heads north to the United Palace Theatre, the premier performance space of Washington Heights, for two performances of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" danced by some one hundred schoolchildren from upper

Simon Roberts's photograph "Meat Market, Pyatigorsk, Northern Caucasus, April, 2005," at Klompching.

Manhattan, diligently rehearsed by a team from Berlin. (Broadway at 175th St.) ♦ Nov. 18 at 7:30: Not all in Berlin is glittering and new: the excellent Berlin Baroque Soloists, directed by the violinist Rainer Kussmaul, offer polished renditions of concertos by Telemann, Handel, Corelli, and Bach. (Zankel Hall.) (212-247-7800.)

ST. THOMAS CHOIR: "BAROQUE MASTERS"
The renowned Anglican choir, with the ensemble Concert Royal, sings two Bach cantatas and three Handel anthems (including "Zadok the Priest"); John Scott, their director and a formidable organist, is the soloist in the same composer's Organ Concerto in F Major. The vocal soloists include the soprano Jolle Greenleaf and the baritone Thomas Meglioranza. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. Nov. 14 at 7:30. For tickets, visit www.saintthomaschurch.org.)

DMITRI HVOROSTOVSKY
The magnetic Russian baritone, accompanied by the Moscow Chamber Orchestra and the Academy of Choral Art, conducted by Constantine Orbelian, sings in a program featuring sacred works, operatic arias by Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, and a bevy of traditional songs full of Russian soul. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. Nov. 14 at 8.)

UBS VERBIER FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
The prestigious corporate-sponsored training orchestra, conducted by Charles Dutoit (and with the pianist Martha Argerich as soloist), performs works by Prokofiev (the Third Piano Concerto) and Berlioz (the "Symphonie Fantastique") at Avery Fisher Hall. (212-721-6500. Nov. 15-16 at 8.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: "HUMAN ELEMENTS"
Leon Botstein's latest adventure with his intrepid ensemble sounds out the theme of the four temperaments (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic) that, to the ancient Greeks, governed human behavior. Three works thus entitled—a waltz by Johann Strauss I, a Hindemith ballet (for Balanchine), and a Nielsen symphony (No. 2)—are on the program, along with Frank Martin's "Four Elements," from 1964. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. Nov. 18 at 3.)

COLLEGIATE CHORALE: "ELIJAH"
Mendelssohn's Biblical masterwork—with the baritone Bryn Terfel, in town for the Met's "Figaro," as the featured soloist—is conducted by Robert Bass. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 19 at 8.)

RECITALS

ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET
The Met soprano Heidi Grant Murphy is the guest of the thrilling Canadian ensemble, which offers works by Franck (the rich, and rarely heard, Quartet), Schumann, Chausson (the "Chanson Perpétuelle"), and Roberto Sierra (a première), presented by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-875-5788. Nov. 14 at 7:30.)

BAM NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL: DANIEL BERNARD ROUMAIN'S "ONE LOSS PLUS"
D.B.R., as he's also known, is a composer-violinist who crosses the boundaries between classical, rock, and hip-hop music with surprising aplomb. He gets a big platform at Brooklyn's Harvey Theatre, where he performs in the world première of a kind of multimedia requiem: electronic and acoustic sounds blended with a video collage (by Janet Wong) that includes posts from YouTube and MySpace in which people discuss the experience of isolation and loss. (651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Nov. 14 and Nov. 16-17 at 7:30.)

"BERLIN IN LIGHTS": THOMAS ADÈS AND THE SCHAROUN ENSEMBLE
The phenomenal English composer-pianist, a special guest at Carnegie Hall this year, performs his complex, captivating Piano Quintet with members of the superb Berlin group in a program that also features music by Schubert (the Octet). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 15 at 7:30.)

"COMPOSER PORTRAIT": PHILIPPE HUREL
The jazz-influenced French spectralist composer is fêted by George Steel's Miller Theatre, which hosts a concert by the excellent International Contemporary Ensemble that features "Six Miniatures en Trompe l'Oeil" and other works. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Nov. 15 at 8.)

Arm wrestling at Port Authority (see Above and Beyond).

GUARNERI STRING QUARTET
The consummately elegant veteran group offers quartets by Mozart (in D Minor, K. 421), Brahms, and Lukas Foss at the Metropolitan Museum. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Nov. 17 at 8.)

BROOKLYN FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC: CHIARA STRING QUARTET
One of America's finest young chamber ensembles (along with the cellist Edward Arron) offers works by Haydn, Osvaldo Golijov ("Yiddishbbuk"), and Schubert (the String Quintet). (Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, 131 Remsen St. Nov. 18 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

MOVIES OPENING

BEOWULF
Blending live action and animation, Robert Zemeckis directed this adaptation, by the screenwriters Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary, of the Old English epic poem, about the warrior who fights the monster Grendel. Starring Angelina Jolie and Ray Winstone. Opening Nov. 16. (In wide release.)

HOW TO COOK YOUR LIFE
A documentary, directed by Doris Dörrie, about the Zen practitioner, chef, and writer Edward Espe Brown. Opening Nov. 16. (IFC Center.)

IT IS FINE! EVERYTHING IS FINE!
Crispin Glover directed this drama, about the sexual obsessions of a man with cerebral palsy. Opening Nov. 16. (IFC Center.)

THE LIFE OF REILLY
A documentary about the actor Charles Nelson Reilly, directed by Barry Poltermann and Frank Anderson. Opening Nov. 16. (Cinema Village.)

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 16. (In wide release.)

MARGOT AT THE WEDDING
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 16. (In wide release.)

MR. MAGORIUM'S WONDER EMPORIUM
A comic fantasy about an aged eccentric (Dustin Hoffman) who leaves his magical toy store to its young manager (Natalie Portman). Directed by Zach Helm. Opening Nov. 16. (In wide release.)

REDACTED
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 16. (In wide release.)

SOUTHLAND TALES
A science-fiction drama, directed by Richard Kelly, about a diverse group of people in Los Angeles who attempt to cope with environmental disaster. Opening Nov. 14. (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

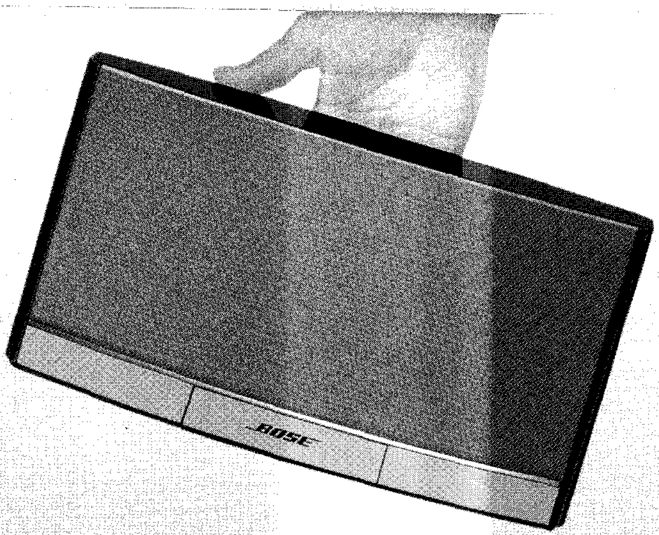
WHAT WOULD JESUS BUY?
A documentary by Rob VanAlkemade about Reverend Billy and his Church of Stop Shopping, an anti-corporate performance group. Opening Nov. 16. (Cinema Village.)

NOW PLAYING

AMERICAN GANGSTER
Dazzling, swift-moving, shallow. We see the rise of the real-life Harlem gangster Frank Lucas (Denzel Washington), who in 1968 went to Northern Thailand, purchased uncut heroin, shipped it to New York, and sold it on the streets at twice the strength and half the price of what the Mafia was selling. Like many modern gangsters, Frank wants to lead an orderly and loving family life and to keep it untainted by what he does. Opposing Frank is the real-life police detective Richie Roberts (Russell Crowe), who hunts Frank down with a group of irregulars (that is, honest cops) operating out of Essex County, New Jersey. Until Frank and Richie's final confrontation, the scenes are brief and emblematic, though the director, Ridley Scott, filming in the street or at clubs and parties, packs as much as he can into the corners and backgrounds of shots and decisively shapes even the most casual moments. "American Gangster" has been made with great panache and drive. But the portrait of Frank never goes beyond admiration of his cleverness, his style, and his entrepreneurial skill, and one comes away with such sour questions as "Why is it supposed to be better that hundreds—maybe thousands—of lives were destroyed in Harlem by black rather than Italian gangsters?" Written by Steven Zaillian and based on a 2000 *New York* magazine piece by Mark Jacobson. With Ruby Dee, Chiwetel Ejiofor, John Ortiz, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Josh Brolin.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/5/07.) (In wide release.)

BEE MOVIE
Jerry Seinfeld joins the hive at DreamWorks Animation for this mediocre tale about a bee (Seinfeld) who falls for a florist (Renée Zellweger) while out on a mission to prove his individuality. Seinfeld's exaggerated delivery gives the movie some bounce, but there's little cohesion to the script, which involves captive bees making honey for an evil entrepreneur, courtroom high jinks, and interspecies romance. Visually, the movie (directed by Simon J. Smith and Steve Hickner) is shiny and bright and lovely, even with the non-stop puns and movie ref-

LAURIE ROSENWALD



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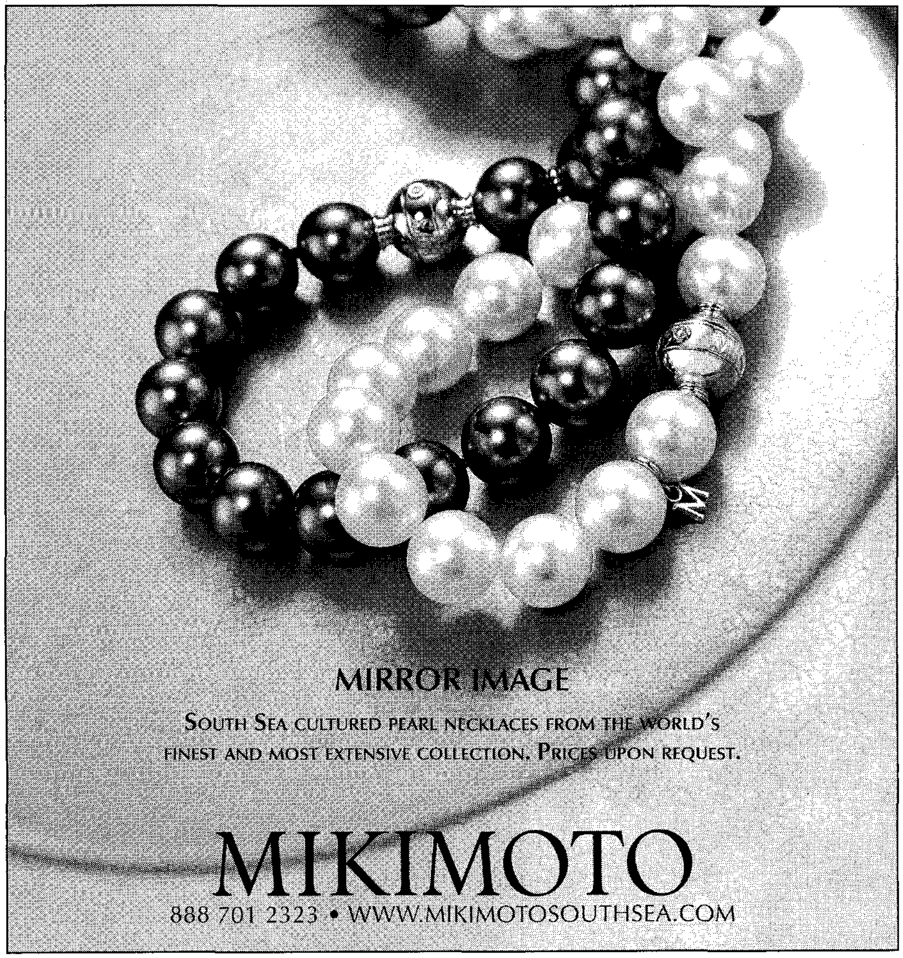
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erences getting in the way. The supporting voices include Chris Rock, Matthew Broderick, and, of course, Sting.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

BEFORE THE DEVIL KNOWS YOU'RE DEAD

In Sidney Lumet's furious and entertaining little morality play, two men hard up for cash—Andy (Philip Seymour Hoffman), a payroll manager at a Manhattan real-estate company, and his not very bright kid brother, Hank (Ethan Hawke)—decide to knock over their parents' jewelry store in Westchester, and everything goes wrong. The movie, written by Kelly Masterson, has an unusual construction: it reaches a climactic moment, then jumps back a few days to lay out the story from the point of view of one character or another. The fractured time scheme brings out the unsurprising but still enlightening lesson that crime should be left to the professionals, and that greed humbles smart-asses like Andy, who think they're invulnerable. If the material had been underplayed, or done as cool, sly satire, its moral and psychological patterns would have seemed obvious and trite. But the excitable Lumet, now eighty-three, pitches the performances as high as he can, and this feels right. He's made an old man's malicious joke about the universality of folly. With Albert Finney as the boys' frightening dad.—*D.D.* (10/29/07) (In wide release.)

DAN IN REAL LIFE

Steve Carell and Juliette Binoche bring life to this gently comic drama, directed by Peter Hedges ("Pieces of April"). Dan (Carell) is an advice columnist, a widower, and a strict but beleaguered father of three daughters, two of them teen-agers. When he takes them to visit his large extended family at his parents' vacation home, he meets Marie (a wonderfully loose Binoche), who happens to be dating his brother (Dane Cook). Amidst the seemingly endless family activities, Dan falls in love with Marie, his focus interrupted only by a brief stint with a neighbor's feisty, high-achieving daughter (the fantastic Emily Blunt). The impressive cast features topnotch actors—including Dianne Wiest, John Mahoney, Alison Pill, and Norbert Leo Butz—who are limited by their one-dimensional roles, and Hedges offers disappointingly simplistic resolutions for every problem. But for fans of Carell and Binoche, who are paired with some success here, the film may prove a guilty pleasure.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

THE DARJEELING LIMITED

The new Wes Anderson film shows that his fixation on families, and on the ties that bind them, continues unabated. Three brothers, played by Adrien Brody, Jason Schwartzman, and Owen Wilson, meet up on a slow train rattling across India. They are mourning the death of their father, planning a vague pilgrimage to their mother (Anjelica Huston), who has herself moved to Asia, and trying to repair their fellowship. The movie steams with minor resentments and misunderstandings that slowly evaporate in the warm-colored, calmative surroundings of an unfamiliar land. It is easy to be exasperated by the brothers' pettiness, but Anderson is one of the few contemporary directors with the nerve to insist that the blandishments of style—in his case, stately tracking shots, sudden romantic songs, and twitchy running gags—can lend form and grace to even the most discontented lives. With a fine opening cameo from Bill Murray, which leaves you wanting more.—*Anthony Lane* (10/15/07) (In wide release.)

DIVORCE—ITALIAN STYLE

When two individualistic comic masterminds like Marcello Mastroianni and the director Pietro Germi meet, it's not often that they produce something as wild and wonderful as this black comedy, about the lengths a man will go to rid himself of a wife in Sicily, circa 1961. Baron Ferdinando Cefalù (Mastroianni) feels stifled in his marriage to the smothering Rosalia (Daniela Rocca) and longs for his nubile, willing sixteen-year-old cousin Angela (Stefania Sandrelli). Divorce is impossible, but inducing a wife to stray and murdering her to defend his manly honor would free a husband from marital bondage with the meagre cost of a fleeting prison term. Mastroianni, Germi, and the co-writers, Ennio De Concini and Alfredo Giannetti, go so far into the dementia of masculine desire that they end up satirizing every subject they touch. The seedy inertia of small-town aristocrats, the self-deceiving power of erotic angst, even the hilarious gap between ideology and sexual politics get sent up—and soar straight into the stratosphere. Germi's visual and storytelling style is fluid, bold, and full of contrast, and Mastroianni is marvellous as a man who himself plays several roles: ennui-ridden local royalty, concerned husband, humiliated cuckold, and a romantic willing to give all for love. (The script won the Best Original Screenplay Oscar in 1962.)—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum.)

FRED CLAUS

The clever idea of giving Santa a family and a Rosebud-like backstory turned into this noisy, bloated, humorless comedy. As the clock ticks down to Christmas, the stressed-out St. Nicholas Claus (Paul Giamatti) persuades his resentful and estranged older brother, Fred (Vince Vaughn), a motormouthed Chicago repo man, to pay him a visit at the North Pole. It turns out to be a company town inhabited mainly by elves whose saccharine ways the cynical Fred, laboring alongside them, tries to shake up. Then a Scrooge-like efficiency expert (Kevin Spacey) shows up and declares the whole outfit on probation, and when Fred, sorting children's letters as "naughty" or "nice," commits a revolutionary act of tolerance—deciding that all children should be considered nice and, thus, worthy of Christmas presents—the entire enterprise is put at risk. Ultimately, of course, family loyalty wins out, Fred saves the day, and both he and Santa learn from the experience. Yet in the interstices of this bland and formulaic tale is the startling fantasy of Fred's liberalized consumerist Christianity covering the globe through his "Top Gun"-like sleigh-piloting. Directed by David Dobkin.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

GONE BABY GONE

In his début film as a feature director, Ben Affleck turns to the gloomy streets of working-class Dorchester. A baby girl belonging to the world's worst mother (Amy Ryan) gets snatched, and a local tough kid who has become a private investigator (Casey Affleck), accompanied by his girlfriend (Michelle Monaghan), look for the child in some of the city's most surly locations. The movie turns into a complicated thriller involving the mother's disapproving family and some very emotional Boston policemen who are obsessed with protecting children. At times, the genre conventions (the material comes out of an early Dennis Lehane thriller) are at odds with the movie's authentic, lived-in look, but Affleck, as a director, has no fear of gazing into the abyss, and he gets some very good actors to follow him. With Morgan Freeman and Ed Harris at his feverish best.—*D.D.* (10/29/07) (In wide release.)

LIONS FOR LAMBS

Not so much a coherent movie as a triptych of related tales, two of them dangerously static. In Washington, an experienced liberal reporter (Meryl Streep) goes head to head with an eager young senator (Tom Cruise), who is backing a new military push in Afghanistan. In California, a college professor (Robert Redford) tries to spur a feckless student (Andrew Garfield) to involve himself more boldly in the world, whatever form that may take. And in Afghanistan itself, a couple of the professor's former students (Derek Luke and Michael Peña), now serving with the American forces, find themselves stranded on a dark hillside with the enemy approaching. The soldiers' predicament, to which we return throughout the film, is intended to dramatize the issues being debated back home, although their heroism has few political implications, being more an example of indissoluble friendship. In short, the movie, written by Matthew Michael Carnahan and directed by Redford, has all the indignation of a wake-up call but no clear idea as to what we should be doing once awake. By a pleasing irony, Tom Cruise, turning his terrifying smile up to maximum, emerges as the most convincing figure in sight. Was that really part of the plan?—*A.L.* (11/12/07) (In wide release.)

LOVE STREAMS

With the self-excoriating casting of himself and his wife, Gena Rowlands, as brother and sister, John Cassavetes, in his last film as writer-director, conjures a heady mood of romantic apocalypse. A successful writer of books about women, Robert Har-

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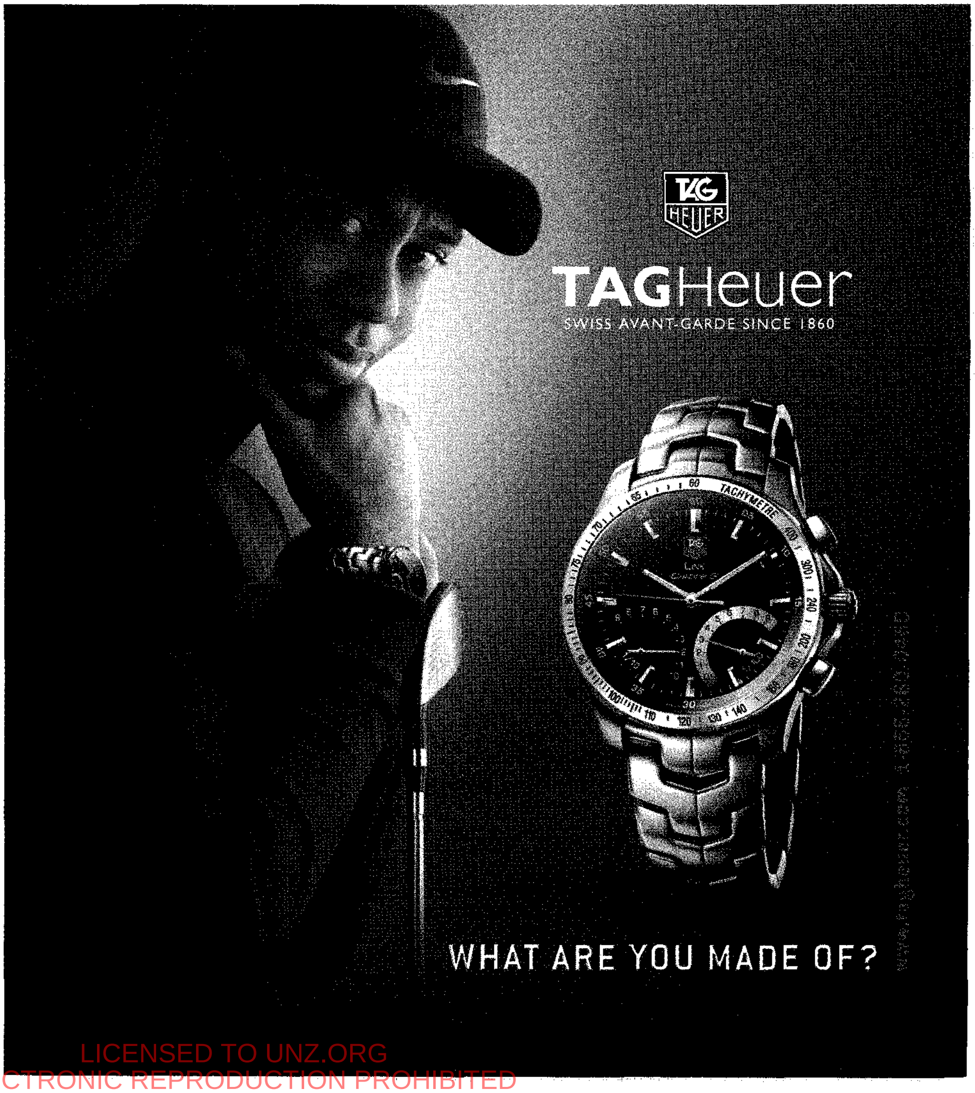

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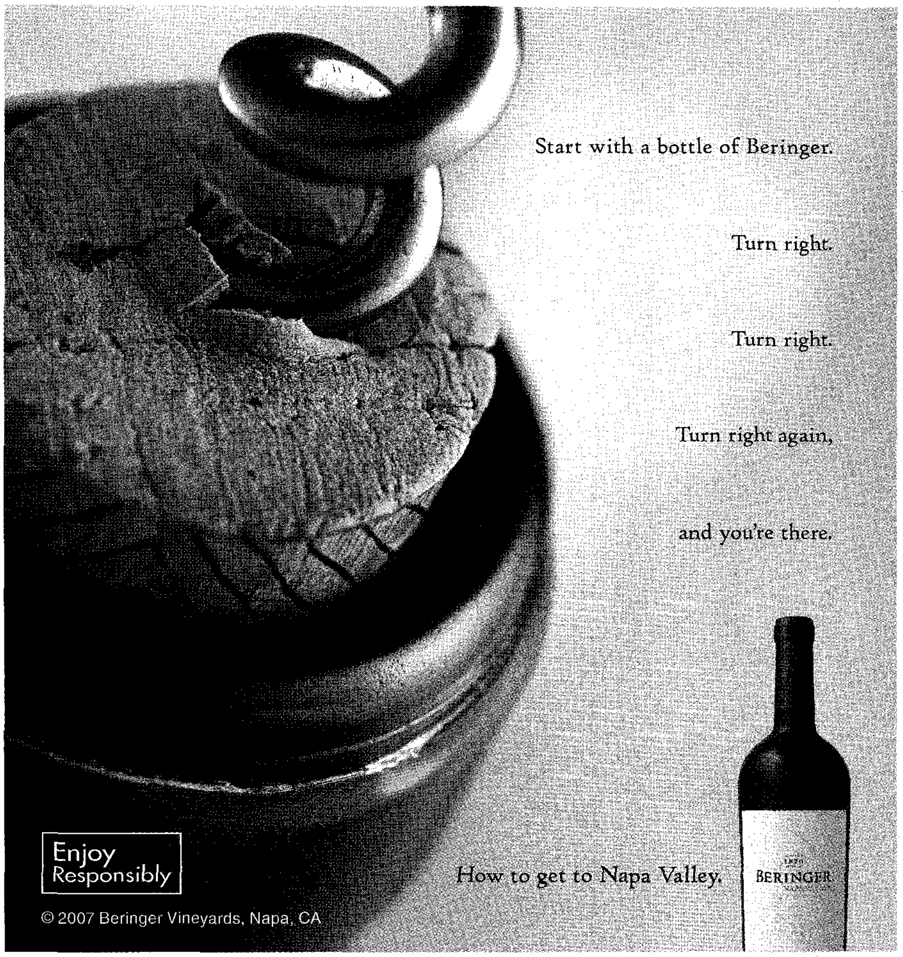
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mon (Cassavetes) fills his suburban Los Angeles home with playgirls, whom he interrogates about their secrets, and he trawls cabarets for research on a book about night life. His sister, Sarah (Rowlands), lives in Chicago, where she has been in and out of mental institutions; miserably divorced, she loses custody of her teen-age daughter, yet keeps her wounded, cockeyed optimism. After Robert's disastrous reunion with the eight-year-old son he'd never seen, Sarah drops in—with two taxis full of baggage—for an open-ended stay. In hypnotically long scenes of a musical ebb and flow, Robert, in an advanced state of alcoholic degradation, and Sarah, in exuberant despair, lurch impulsively from high to high and bear the blows they give and take for love. "Life," he tells her, "is a series of suicides, divorces, promises broken, children smashed, whatever," and the controlled yet agonized performances raise the self-pitying asides to Beckett-like poetry for the shipwrecked survivors of the Tuxedo Age. Released in 1984.—*R.B.* (BAM; Nov. 19.)

MARTIAN CHILD

A touching, heartfelt, clever near-miss. The tale of David Gordon (John Cusack), a science-fiction writer and grieving widower who adopts Dennis (Bobby Coleman), a brilliant oddball, has enough integrity to make its flaws all the more obvious. The boy insists, disturbingly, that he is from Mars—and has the quirks to back the claim up. Coleman is extraordinarily credible as a little genius; in his scenes with Cusack, the filial relationship grows plausibly and movingly, thanks to the perceptive eye of the director, Menno Meyjes, and the cinematographer, Robert Yeoman. The script, by Seth Bass and Jonathan Tolins, based on a novel by David Gerrold, offers irresistibly heartwarming, tear-jerking, stand-up-and-cheer moments, but Meyjes never conjures a world, inner or outer, so the result is just a string of effective scenes. Nonetheless, a charming Martian dance, a memorable use of M&M's, and several stunning missed connections suggest the heights that this tender drama could have scaled.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

MICHAEL CLAYTON

A gabby, irresistibly entertaining New York thriller. Michael Clayton (George Clooney), a law-firm fixer of dubious ethics, is dispatched to rein in the firm's chief litigator (Tom Wilkinson), a high-strung guy who has discovered a document that incriminates one of the firm's clients and has responded by going off his meds and out of his mind. Michael, it turns out, is only slightly less disgusted by the dirty business than the litigator is, and the movie catches him during a period of four frantic days in which all the strains in his life are pushing him to the breaking point. The screenwriter Tony Gilroy both wrote and directed the movie, and he keeps the tension level high—too high at times; the movie needs to breathe more. Yet the inside-the-law-firm chatter and poker-table badinage come off superbly. Clooney, looking a little haggard, gives a lovely performance as a smart man who has a few too many scruples to be a winner.—*D.D.* (10/8/07) (In wide release.)

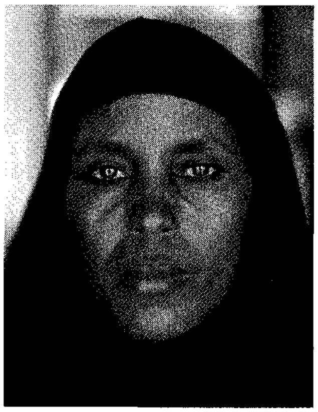
NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN

The new Coen brothers movie is adapted from Cormac McCarthy's novel of the same name. Javier Bardem, his menace half-masked by a comical haircut, plays a calm, unstoppable psychopath on the trail of a stolen two million dollars. (His presence is both frightening and entertaining, if never wholly credible.) Various unfortunates cross his path and suffer the consequences, but his principal target is Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin), a passing hunter who took the money. Following them both is Sheriff Bell (Tommy Lee Jones), who seems in no particular hurry, and whose ruminations on crimes past and present committed in this desolate part of Texas are spoken in a gravelly voice-over. The movie, photographed by Roger Deakins, is almost stately in its ominous control, drawing us into the minutiae of mayhem and revenge; what other filmmakers would devote an extended scene to the stashing of booty in a ventilation shaft? The result is oddly unemotional, as if a vicious game were being played by solemn rules, with barely a flicker of interest in the characters' moral plight. Only Kelly Macdonald, in her beautifully judged

FAZAL SHEIKH

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ART AND SOUL

The photographs in Fazal Sheikh's first exhibition, in 1995, were portraits of refugees who'd fled civil unrest in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia and found shelter in Kenya. His most recent works, currently on view at the Princeton University Art Museum, depict Indian widows and girls who have found themselves to be outcasts in a culture where female infanticide still regularly occurs. In between, Sheikh has worked in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Brazil, and the Netherlands, documenting the displaced and the persecuted—people whose basic human rights are at stake. A compact, engrossing survey of this work at Pace/MacGill couldn't look less like photojournalism. Sheikh's subjects are not anonymous victims; all but a few are identified by name. At once descriptive and loving, and warm rather than cool, the photographs are extraordinarily moving portraits in the classic mode (think Julia Margaret Cameron and Irving Penn), whose aesthetic weight is multiplied by the power of their maker's concern.



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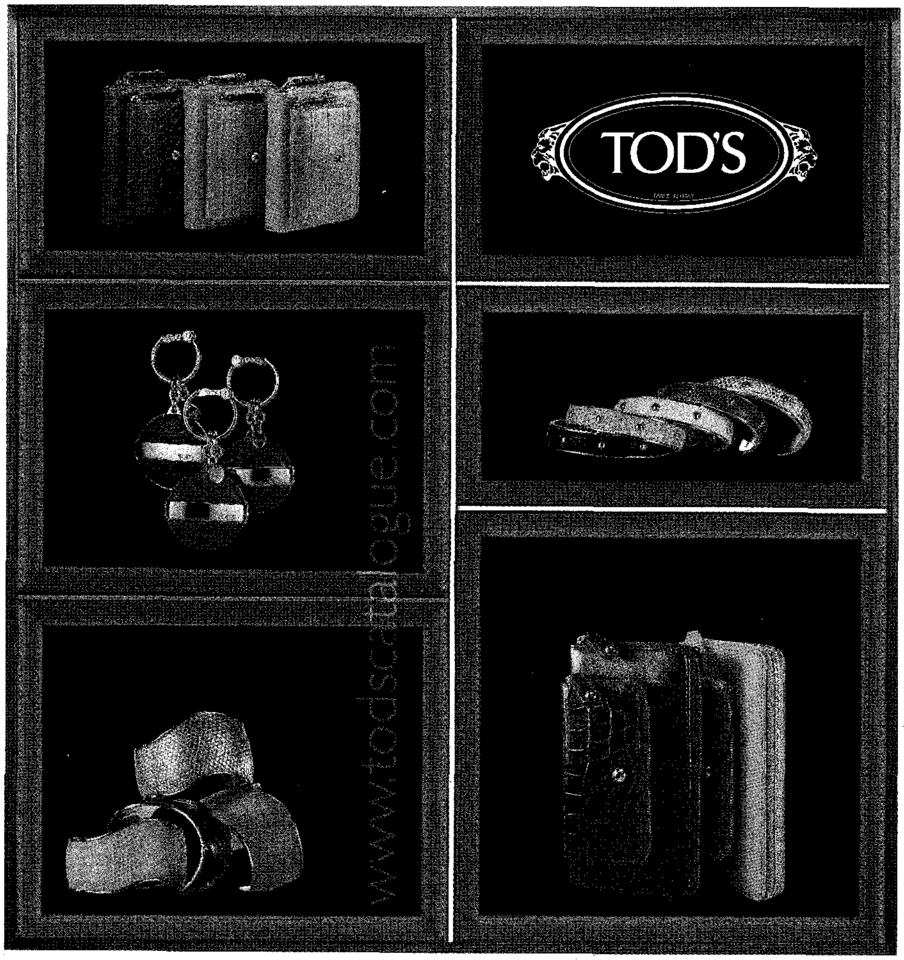

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(and accented) performance as Moss's wife, begins to restore the balance. With Woody Harrelson.—*A.L.* (11/12/07) (In wide release.)

WE OWN THE NIGHT
The new film by James Gray feels like a companion piece to "The Yards," his earlier, equally dark saga of crime and domestic discord in New York. Both films star Joaquin Phoenix and Mark Wahlberg; in the first film, they played best friends, and this time they're brothers—closer in blood but painfully divided by the course of their lives. Bobby (Phoenix) runs a night club, while Joseph (Wahlberg), following in the stern footsteps of his father (Robert Duvall), is a Brooklyn cop. When Bobby is asked to help entrap a Russian drug lord, he finds himself being pulled away from the good times (this is 1988) and back into his family, to the dismay of his girlfriend, Amada (Eva Mendes). The moral motion of the film is fairly simple—the return and redemption of a prodigal son—but Gray steeps his tale in murky complication, and the staging of every scene, be it downbeat or frantic, is so assured that you barely notice the implausibilities. (Bobby and Joseph, for instance, hardly look like brothers.) The rain-drenched car chase, halfway through, is reason enough to see the film.—*A.L.* (10/22/07) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

DARFUR NOW: Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. **MR. UNTOUCHABLE:** In wide release. **SAW IV:** In wide release. **WAR/DANCE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Films and videos by Carolee Schneemann. Nov. 15 at 7:30: Short works, including "Fuses" (1965-67). ♦ Nov. 16-17 at 7:30: "Kitch's Last Meal" (1973-78). ♦ Special screenings. Nov. 15-16 at 8: "Raiders of the Lost Ark: The Adaptation" (1982-89, Eric Zala). ♦ Nov. 17-18 at 4: "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (1981, Steven Spielberg). ♦ Nov. 17 at 7:30: "A First Quarter" (1973, Lawrence Weiner). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Nov. 18 at 6: Short films by Tony Conrad (1966-74).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—New Czech films. All films are in Czech. Nov. 14 at 7: "I Served the King of England" (2006, Jiři Menzel), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Nov. 15 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Rules of Lies" (2006, Robert Sedláček). ♦ Nov. 16 at 2 and 6:50: "Beauty in Trouble" (2006, Jan Hřebejk). ♦ Nov. 16 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Dolls" (2007, Karin Babinská). ♦ Nov. 17 at 2 and 6:50: "Grandhotel" (2006, David Ondřiček). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the actress Klára Issová. ♦ Nov. 17 at 4:30 and 9:40: "One Night in a Big City" (2007, Jan Balej). ♦ Nov. 18 at 2 and 6:50: "Pleasant Moments" (2006, Věra Chytilová). ♦ "Jonathan Lethem Selects." Nov. 19 at 6 and 9: "Love Streams" (†). ♦ A tribute to Ingmar Bergman. Nov. 19 at 7: Selected readings from Bergman's diaries; readers include Bibi Andersson, Pernilla August, and Lena Olin. (At BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn.) ♦ Nov. 20 at 6: "Persona" (1966; in Swedish), introduced by Andersson. ♦ Nov. 20 at 8:45: "Shame" (1968), introduced by Lethem.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 14-20 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Diva" (1981, Jean-Jacques Beineix; in French). ♦ Nov. 14-15 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10 and Nov. 16-22 at 9:20: "Divorce—Italian Style" (†). ♦ Nov. 16-22 at 1, 2:40, 4:20, 6, and 7:40: "The Red Balloon" (1956, Albert Lamorisse) and "White Mane" (1952, Lamorisse; in French).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Fashion Icons." Nov. 20 at 12:30 and 7: "Breathless" (1959, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through Nov. 15: CinemaEast Film Festival. For complete program information, visit www.arteeast.org. Nov. 14 at 6:30 and Nov. 15 at 4:30: "In the Heliopolis Flat" (2007, Mohamed Khan; in Arabic), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Nov. 15 at 7: "Rome Rather Than You" (2006, Tariq Teguia; in Arabic). ♦ In revival. Nov. 16-18 at noon: "Hysterical Blindness" (2002, Mira Nair). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 16-17: "Mulholland Drive" (2001, David Lynch). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Nov. 20 at 7:30: "Protagonist" (2007, Jessica Yu).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Nov. 14 at 1:30: "Black Girl" (1966, Ousmane Sembene; in French) and "Borom Sarret" (1963, Sembene; in French). ♦ Nov. 15 at 1:30: "The Seventh Seal" (1957, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Through Nov. 30: "Iberoamérica," new films from Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. Except where noted, all films are in Spanish. Nov. 14 at 7: "Kill Them All" (2007, Esteban Schroeder), with a live music performance. ♦ Nov. 15 at 6: "Satan" (2006, Andres Baiz Ochoa). ♦ Nov. 15 at 8, Nov. 17 at 5, and Nov. 18 at 6:15: "Such Is Life" (2000, Arturo Ripstein). The Nov. 15 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ Nov. 16 at 6: "The Dignity of the Nobodies" (2005, Fernando E. Solanas), introduced by the director. ♦ Nov. 16 at 8:30: "The Heart of Jesus" (2003, Marcos Loayza). ♦ Nov. 17 at 3: "Fados" (2007, Carlos Saura; in Portuguese). ♦ Nov. 17 at 7:30: "The Night of the Sunflowers" (2006, Jorge Sánchez-Cabezudo). ♦ Nov. 18 at 2: "Machuca" (2004, Andrés Wood). ♦ Nov. 18 at 4:30: "The Immortal" (2004, Mercedes Moncada). ♦ Nov. 19 at 6: "Waiting List" (2000, Juan Carlos Tabio). ♦ Nov. 19 at 8: "Kamchatka" (2002, Marcelo Piñeyro). ♦ Special screening. Nov. 15 at 6:30: "Verdun, Visions of History" (1928, Léon Poirier; silent). ♦ "Best Film Not Playing at a Theatre Near You," unreleased independent films. Nov. 16 at 6 and Nov. 18 at 1:30: "Off the Grid: Life on the Mesa" (2007, Jeremy and Randy Stulberg). ♦ Nov. 16 at 8:30 and Nov. 18 at 3:30: "August the First" (2007, Lanre Olabisi). ♦ Nov. 17 at 2 and Nov. 18 at 5:45: "Mississippi Chicken" (2007, John Fiege). ♦ Nov. 17 at 4:30 and Nov. 19 at 7: "Frownland" (2007, Ronald Bronstein). The Nov. 19 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ Nov. 17 at 7 and Nov. 19 at 5: "Loren Cass" (2007, Chris Fuller).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—In première. Nov. 15 at 7: "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" (2007, Julian Schnabel), introduced by the director and members of the cast. At Clearview Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St. (For ticket information, call 718-784-4520.) ♦ Through Dec. 2: "Glorious Technicolor!" Nov. 17 at 2: "Becky Sharp" (1935, Rouben Mamoulian), followed by a book signing with the writer Scott Higgins. ♦ Nov. 17 at 6: "Trail of the Lonesome Pine" (1936, Henry Hathaway). ♦ Nov. 18 at 4:30: "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (1938, Michael Curtiz and William Keighley). ♦ Nov. 18 at 6:30: "Slightly Scarlet" (1956, Allan Dwan).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 16 at 9:30: "The Nights of Cabiria" (1957, Federico Fellini; in Italian), introduced by the writer Thomas Cahill.

SCANDINAVIA HOUSE
58 Park Ave., at 38th St. (212-847-9779)—A tribute to Ingmar Bergman. Nov. 17 at 5:30: "Bergman Island" (2004-06, Marie Nyreröd; in Swedish).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Nov. 16-17: "Bottle Rocket" (1996, Wes Anderson).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screenings. Nov. 16-21 (call for showtimes): "The Whole Shootin' Match" (1978, Eagle Pennell). ♦ "An Evening with David Fincher." Nov. 19 at 7: "Zodiac: The Director's Cut" (2007, Fincher), followed by a discussion with Fincher and the writer Kent Jones.

DVD NOTES
SILENTS ARE GOLDEN

The psychological subtlety of the silent cinema owes much to a complex visual grammar that D. W. Griffith employed to tell surprisingly old-fashioned stories. His **"True Heart Susie"** (Image Entertainment), from 1919, is the tale of a simple country girl (Lillian Gish) who makes sacrifices to advance the career of the boy next door (Robert Harron) but is thrown over for a shameless hussy. In a masterful sequence in which Susie hides behind hedges and espies her beloved with the new girl, Griffith suggests the dislocation of her existence with jolting cuts between startlingly modulated angles. Yet the core of the scene, the closeups, are also the heart of Griffith's work. A hypnotic one, running thirty-five seconds, shows Susie when she sees her life's dreams definitively shattered. There, the framing of Gish's tremulous virtuosity reveals the source of Griffith's art in classical portraiture.

The early cinema's poetic style of emphatic and highly inflected gestures was ready-made for the grotesque, as seen in the great **"Nosferatu,"** from 1922, by the German director F. W. Murnau (released by Kino, in an amazingly vibrant restoration). In this loose (and unauthorized) adaptation of Bram Stoker's "Dracula," a German real-estate agent travels to Transylvania to sell a house to Count Orlok, who turns out to be the title vampire (played by the freakish and utterly convincing Max Schreck). Murnau framed the spectral drama with a sober chronicle of an outbreak of the Black Death. Inspired by German romanticism, he infuses nature and science with the supernatural, balancing lurid special effects with a realistic view of disease-bearing rats and clinical macrophotography of predatory spiders and a Venus flytrap. Yet the metaphysical style is most vividly rendered by Murnau's obsessive use of point-of-view shots, which force a viewer to follow the characters into the abyss of their terrifying visions.

The cinema's first modernist, its one-man Cubist-style revolutionary, was the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein. As his most famous work, **"Battleship Potemkin"** (also in a fine restoration from Kino), from 1925, shows, his analytical, quasi-scientific methods bore the mark of both aesthetic and political upheavals. This stirring work of agitprop, based on a primal event in the first Russian revolution, of 1905, tells the story of a battleship crew that mutinied in revolt against their cruel and tyrannical officers; the spread of their uprising to shore culminates in the celebrated Odessa Steps sequence, showing sympathizers being chased and gunned down by the Tsar's troops. The hundred and fifty shots in this six-minute scene feature a vast array of angles, and the technique was one with the ideology Eisenstein was promoting: the multiple, shifting, and indeterminate points of view mirror the political program of emphasizing not one character's psychology but the abstract condition and viewpoint of the masses.

—*Richard Brody*

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READINGS AND TALKS

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Following a screening of Jennifer Callahan's documentary in progress "The Bungalows of Rockaway," the journalist Eve Kahn moderates a discussion about the mostly lost summer residences in Queens, with Jill Eisenstadt, the author of the novel "From Rockaway," and the architectural historian Andrew S. Dolkart. There will also be a slide presentation by Anthony King, the author of "The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture." (Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. 212-534-1672. Nov. 13 at 6:30.)

THE JEWISH MUSEUM
In conjunction with the museum's William Steig show, Lee Lorenz, the former cartoon editor of this magazine, moderates a discussion between the *New Yorker* writer Roger Angell, the illustrator Edward Sorel, and Holly McGhee, Steig's agent, about the life and work of the late artist. (Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. 212-423-3200. Nov. 15 at 6:30.)

CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ
Mark Strand, a former U.S. poet laureate, drops by this West Village boîte for a reading Nov. 16 at 6. (29 Cornelia St. Tickets at the door.)

MCNALLY ROBINSON BOOKSELLERS
Amy Goldswasser, the editor of the new anthology "Red: The Next Generation of American Writers—Teenage Girls—On What Fires Up Their Lives Today," has arranged for a number of its fifty-eight contributors, who live all over the country, to come to New York City to read from their work, in honor of the book's publication. (52 Prince St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 16 at 7.)

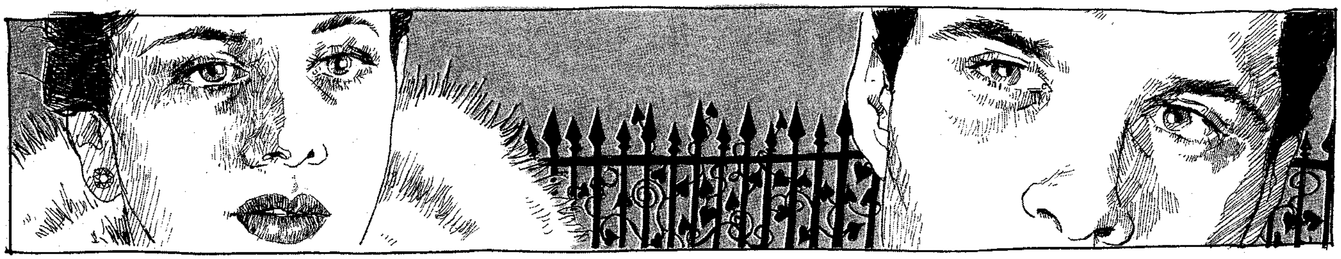
POETS HOUSE
The SoHo library and literary center is moving to Battery Park City, but before it does so it's throwing one last bash at its current location. More than twenty-five poets will be on hand for a five-hour party. Mark Doty, Jean Valentine, Edward Hirsch, Bob Holman, and many others will read from their work. (72 Spring St., 2nd fl. No tickets necessary. Nov. 17, starting at 4.)

THE GREAT HALL
The film scholar Antonio Monda recently published the book "Do You Believe?: Conversations on God and Religion," in which he interviews eighteen prominent artists and writers about their religious beliefs. On Nov. 19 at 7, he joins a few of them—Paul Auster, Nathan Englander, Paula Fox, and Colum McCann—for a discussion. (Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

ARM WRESTLING
The 2007 Empire State Golden Arm Tournament of Champions comes to the Port Authority Bus Terminal on Nov. 15 at 12:30, pitting the winners of the preliminary events in the five boroughs and Long Island against each other, last year's winners, and anyone else who is interested, male or female, left-handed or right; it may be an Empire State title, but the competition is open, and there are no residency requirements. This is the event's thirtieth anniversary. (North-Wing/Main Concourse, 625 Eighth Ave., between 41st and 42nd Sts. Weigh-in starts at 10 A.M.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The major auction houses' big-ticket jamboree enters its second week, with sales of postwar and contemporary works next on the schedule. **Christie's** evening sale (Nov. 13) teems with iconic names, from Rothko and Richter to the playful Jeff Koons and the ubiquitous Andy Warhol, who is represented by two major works in the sale, "Liz" (from 1963) and "Elvis 2 Times"; a cluster of contemporary Chinese artists also get their turn in the sun. After morning and afternoon sessions the next day, the focus switches to twentieth-century Latin-American art (Nov. 19-20) in a sale led by an exceptionally vivid work by the Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo ("Trovador," from 1945) and featuring works by Botero, Alfredo Ramos Martínez, and Remedios Varo. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Rothko, Koons, and Warhol are prominently featured in **Sotheby's** evening sale (Nov. 14), which also includes two works by Francis Bacon: "Second Version of Study for Bullfight No. 1" (from a series of three Bacon works on this brutal subject) and "Self-Portrait," made at the age of sixty. After two days filled with contemporary art and twentieth-century design there comes a Latin-American sale (Nov. 20-21) that features several Tamayo works, including the much talked about "Tres Personajes," an enigmatic composition in rich reds and purples which, having been stolen in Texas in 1987, was later abandoned on the streets of New York, only to be spotted by an Upper West Sider on her morning coffee run. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The downtown upstart **Phillips** offers its own take on the contemporary-art market (Nov. 15-16); its evening sale includes a late de Kooning (the sensual, colorful "Untitled XVI"), as well as a large landscape of laughing faces by the Chinese "cynical realist" Yue Minjun ("I Am Chinese"). (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)



Max Ophüls's 1948 film "Letter from an Unknown Woman," at BAM.

HOPE GANGLOFF

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
TO THE MAX
Nov. 28-Dec. 18

If civilization is a glossy veneer concealing fiery desires, Max Ophüls is the most civilized of directors. His graceful tracking shots and dry wit adorn tales of raging lust and shocking degradation. BAM offers three weeks of Ophüls's works, including "La Ronde," from 1950; the little-seen film "The Trouble with Money," from 1936; and a weeklong run of "Letter from an Unknown Woman," from 1948. (718-636-4100.)

THE THEATRE
PEACE ON EARTH
Nov. 30-Dec. 30

At the Duke on 42nd Street, the Classical Theatre of Harlem presents "Black Nativity," the Langston Hughes musical from 1961. In the original, a group of pilgrims travelling north stops to celebrate the birth of Jesus. This production—starring André De Shields and directed by Alfred Preisser, with a gospel-infused songbook—is transported to the seedy streets of Times Square circa 1973, and its chorus includes members of the Shangilia Youth Choir of Kenya. (646-223-3010.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
RUSSIAN VOICES
Dec. 1-2 and Dec. 4

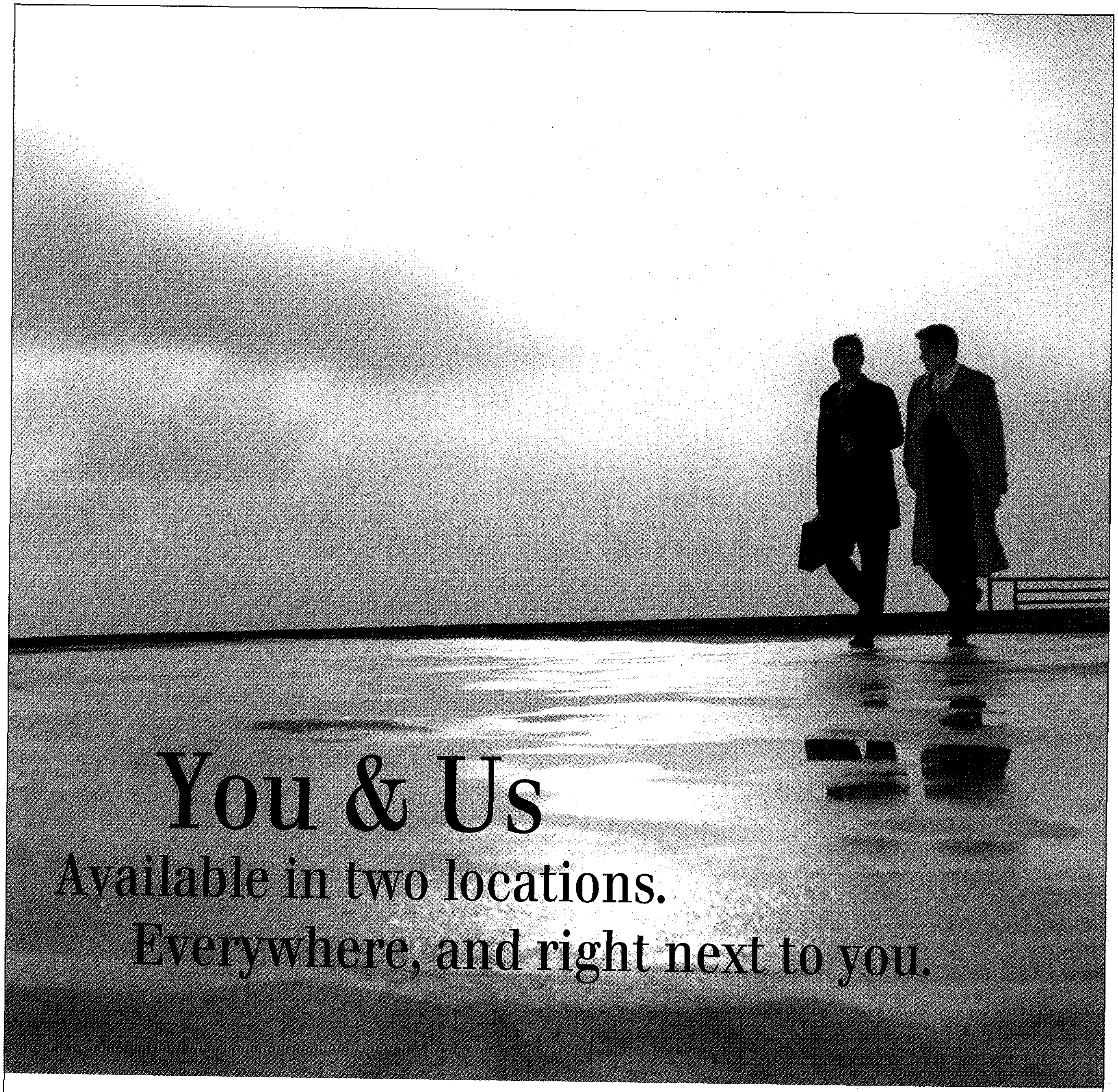
Valery Gergiev and his Kirov Orchestra sweep into Carnegie Hall next month with a bushel of Russian operas in tow, including such seldom heard works as Stravinsky's raucous "Les Noces" and Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Snow Maiden." (212-247-7800.)

NIGHT LIFE
LEFT OF CENTER
Dec. 9

Danbert Nobacon (né Nigel Hunter), the shaven-headed, freewheeling vocalist for the Leeds anarchist folk collective Chumbawamba, visits the Mercury Lounge with songs from his politically charged new solo record, "Library Book of the World." (212-260-4700.)

ART
PAPER TRAIL
Dec. 16-March 10, 2008

In "Lucien Freud: The Painter's Etchings," at MOMA, seventy prints will be exhibited alongside a selection of related paintings and drawings. (212-708-9400.)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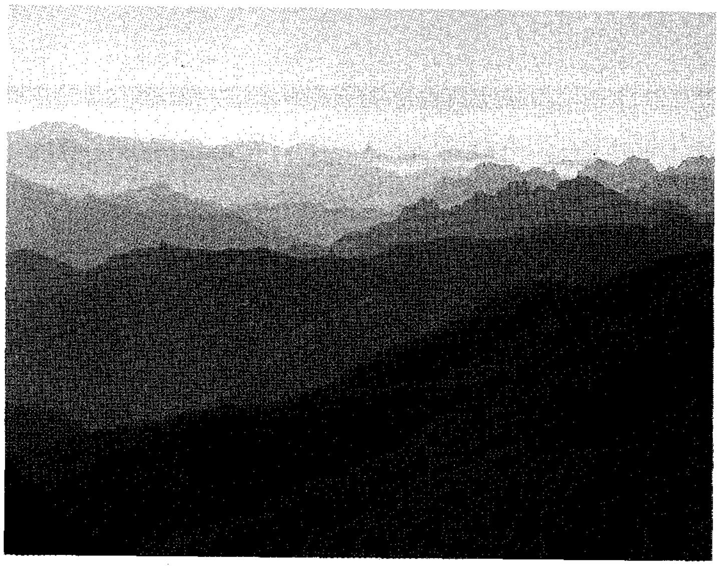
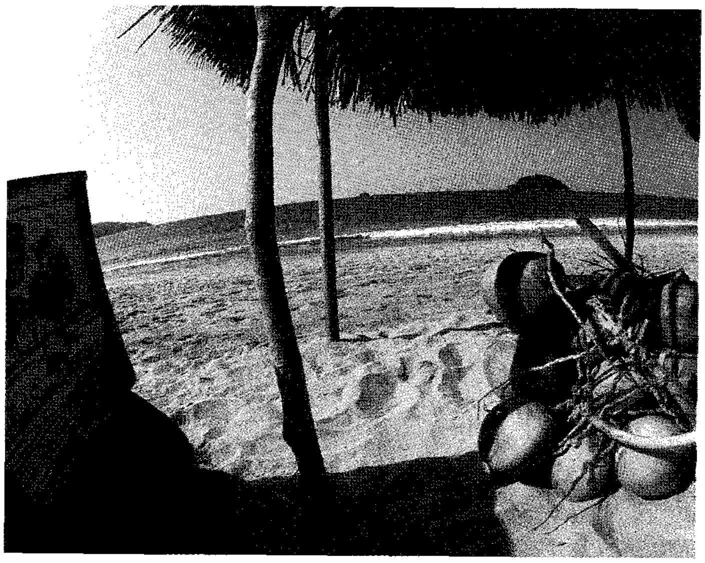
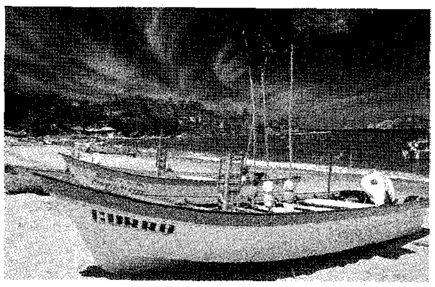




STRIKING THE PERFECT BALANCE

Riviera Nayarit is in the heart of one of the world's largest bays on Mexico's Central Pacific Coast. Set just south of the Tropic of Cancer, this sunny destination is protected by tropical jungle and the Sierra Madre Mountains. Along its hundred miles of coastline, there are fishing villages, surfing havens, and charming colonial towns, with top-notch hotels, spas, marinas, and golf courses interspersed throughout.

Natural wonders abound in this thickly forested region, which is located only a few miles from Puerto Vallarta. Visitors can watch whales from a catamaran, swim with friendly seals, or snorkel near coral reefs. Thanks to nearby wildlife sanctuaries, the area also brims with exotic birdlife. It's one of the best bird-watching destinations in the world.



For boaters, **Marina Riviera Nayarit** is designed to be the best marina in the country, with almost four hundred slips. Those who prefer hiking to beachcombing can climb the nearby mountains, up to two thousand feet. Others can horseback ride through the jungle, or use mountain bikes to explore the trails. For avid golfers, Riviera Nayarit offers several courses surrounded by the serene beauty of the bay. **The Marina Vallarta Golf Club** is a par-71 eighteen-hole championship course, while **Flamingos Golf Club** and **The Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita** both have eighteen holes at par 72.

Quiet villages are easy to come by here. Just south of Puerto Vallarta is **Quimixto**, accessible only by water taxi. This town is known for its tranquil waters, making it perfect for leisurely beachcombing, skin-diving, and snorkeling. Visitors can also rent a pony and venture inland to cool off under a soothing waterfall.

Only forty-five minutes north of the Puerto Vallarta airport is the picturesque village of **Sayulita**. Located on a sandy beach, this bohemian town is a great destination for kayaking, surfing, cycling, and horseback riding, while its cobblestone streets and rustic air offer a taste of rural Mexico. Four miles north of Sayulita, **San Francisco** is also off the beaten tourist path, known for its stunning white sand beach, picturesque streets, and excellent restaurants.

Still farther north, the colonial town of **San Blas** and the resort enclave of **Punta Mita** boast countless beaches. This area is also the entry point into a vast wetlands system—a boat trip into the jungle estuary is not to be missed.

Riviera Nayarit's cultural history dates back thousands of years. The nearby island of **Mexcaltitán** is reputed to be the location of Aztlán, the legendary birthplace of the Aztecs. Archeological sites with hundreds of petroglyphs and vestiges of ancient villages are awaiting further study throughout the area. In all, the coastline of Rivera Nayarit has managed to maintain the delicate balance between comfort and culture, making it well worth a visit.

FROM TOP LEFT: SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS © JUPITER IMAGES; BEACH AT SAYULITA © ALAMY; BOTTOM LEFT: BOATS AT RINCÓN DE GUAYABITOS © ALAMY

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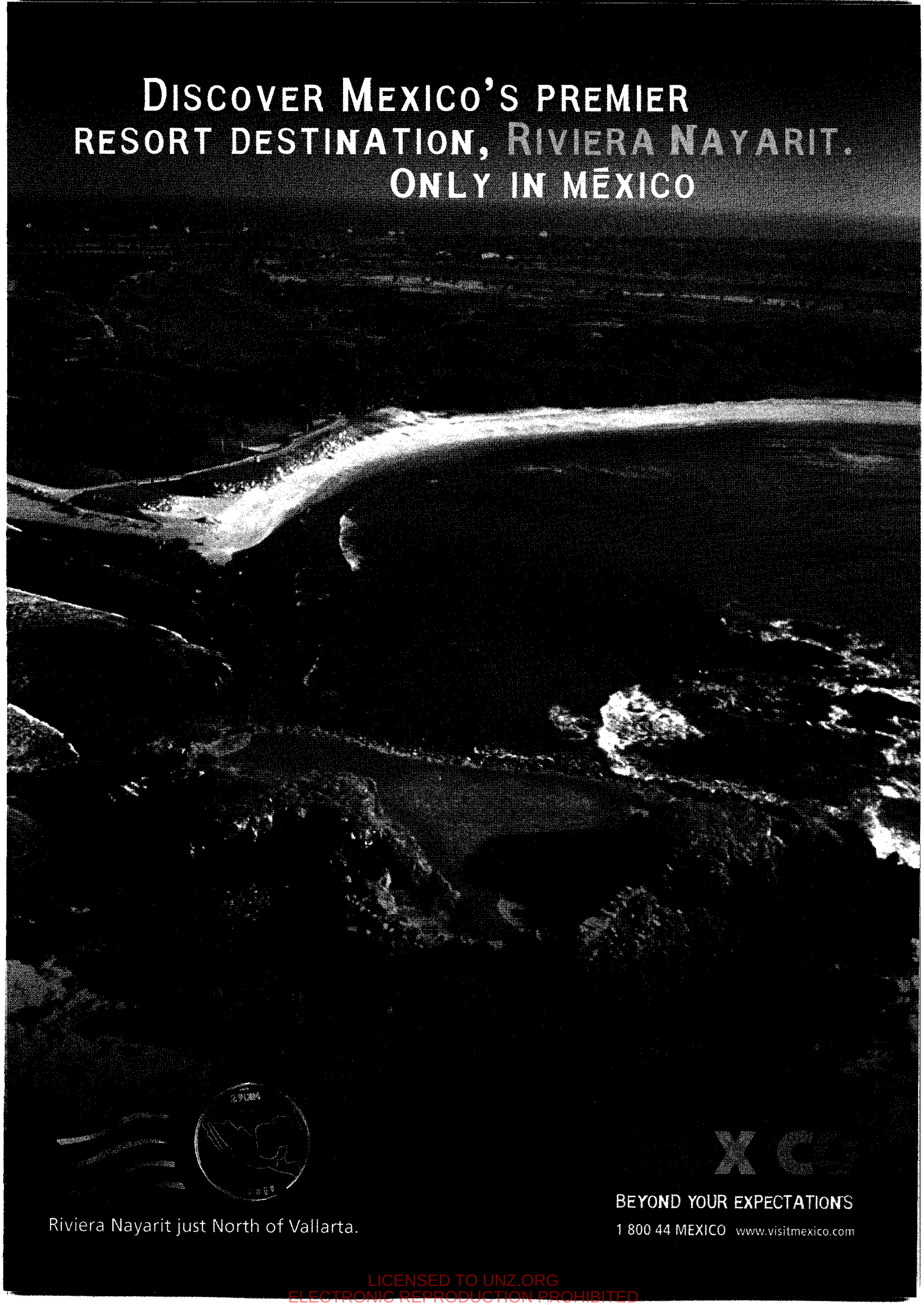
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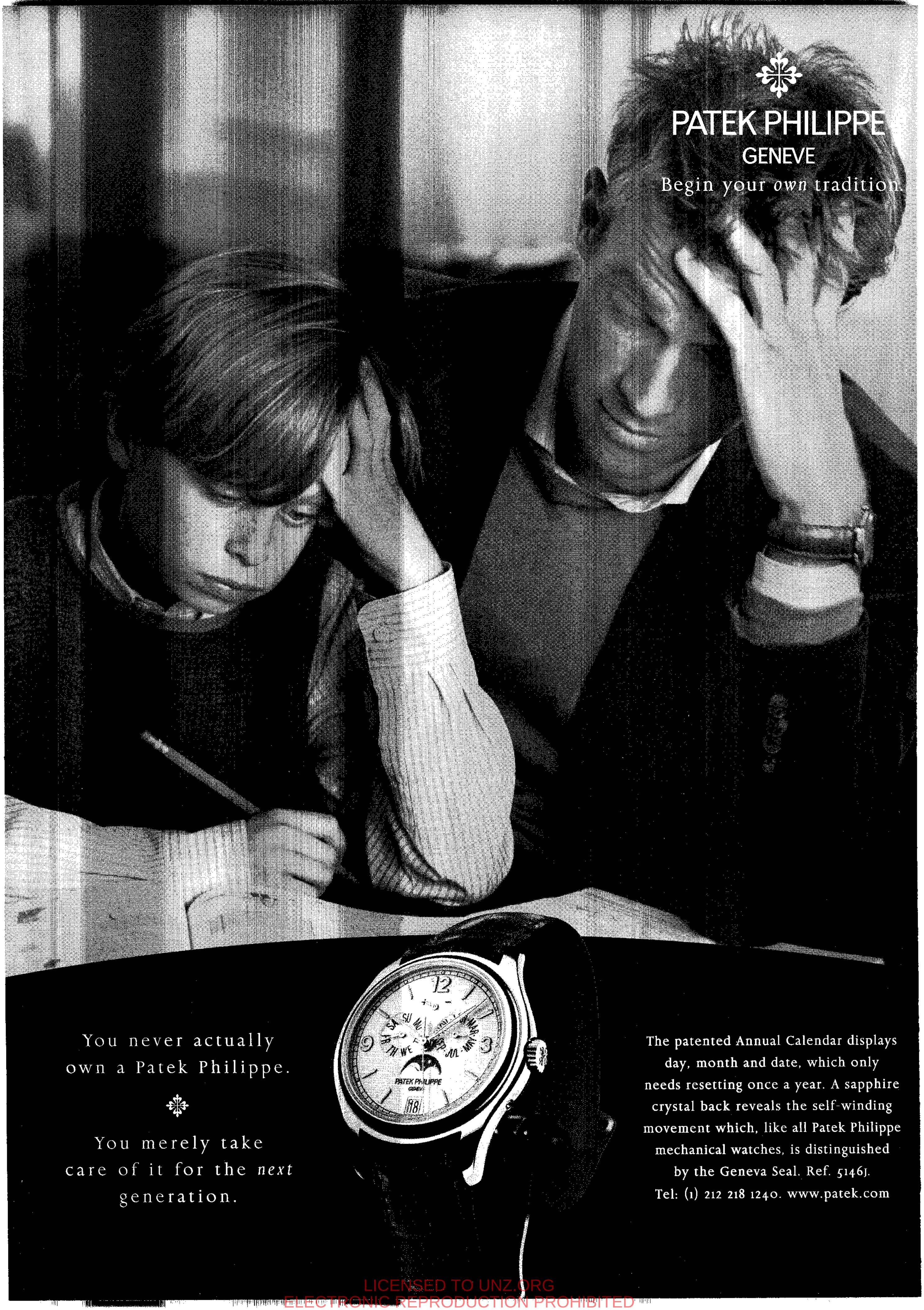

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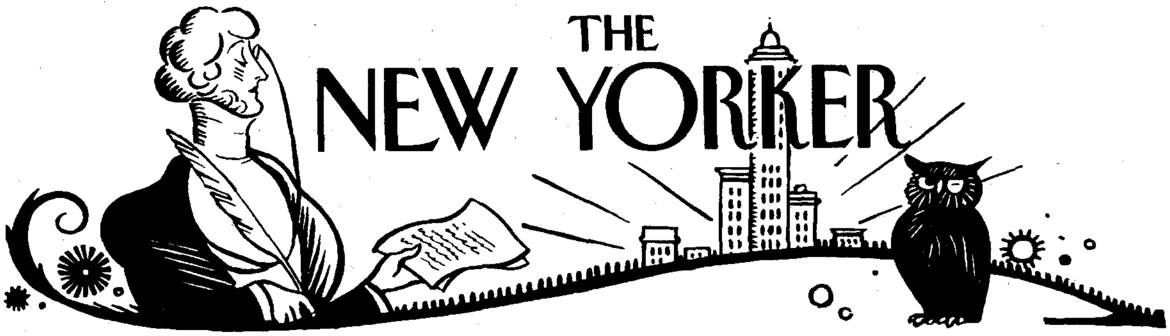
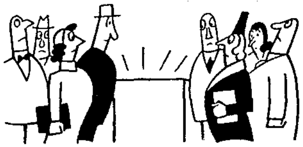


THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MISCALCULATIONS



In his autobiography, "In the Line of Fire," published last year, the Pakistani military leader, General Pervez Musharraf, describes himself as a once talented college athlete. His achievements attracted a particular compliment that lingered long in his mind:

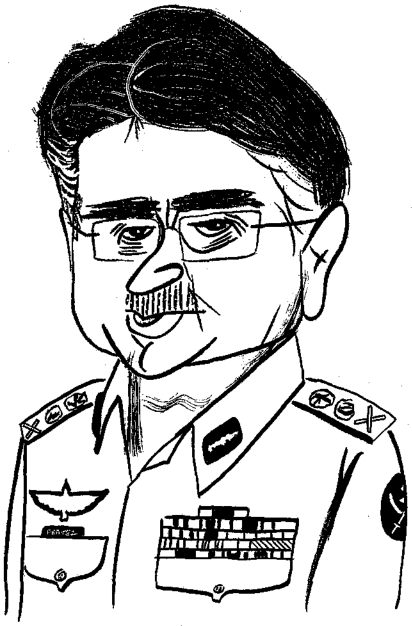
> I was fourth in cross-country, was the top gymnast, and was third in the "Mr. FC College" bodybuilding competition. . . . Muhammad Iqbal Butt, who had competed creditably in the Mr. Universe competition, told me at the time that I had a most muscular physique.

Yet Musharraf did not always feel a need to display his prowess. As a boy, he had a brown dog called Whiskey, who taught him life lessons:

> I prefer small dogs, though, not the huge ones. This surprises my friends, for they expect a commando to have something like a rottweiler. I think people who keep rottweilers, and similar dogs, have a need to cultivate a macho image.

Musharraf, whose military career includes seven years in the Pakistani Special Forces, is a compact man of medium height who wears rimless glasses and parts his hair unfashionably down the middle; in person, speaking in fluent English, he can come across as more than a little self-regarding. His father was a middle-class auditor in government service, and his mother had high ambitions for her sons. One became a doctor, and, eight years ago, Pervez seized control of his nuclear-armed country.

The Army has ruled Pakistan directly for more than half the country's existence. It is by far Pakistan's most important institution—a source of cohesion and national identity, but also of dissonance, internal violence, inequality, and constitutional failure. As the Army's chief for almost a decade, Musharraf has held the confidence—or, at least, the obedience—of his fellow-generals, and of the more credulous Bush Administration. The General is a secular and liberal-minded individual, and he has certainly acted bravely at times in his attempts to combat Islamic extremists, but he has also proved to be a remarkably poor politician and domestic strategist.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Pakistan is gripped by two overlapping crises. The more visible one is the struggle between Musharraf, the judiciary, and the civilian politicians over elections and power sharing—an uncompromising contest among compromised leaders that two weeks ago culminated in a state of emergency, followed by an Army-led crackdown on human-rights activists, the independent media, and political organizers. It is sustained in part by the competition between two forces: the military, a broadly based, middle-class, undemocratic institution; and the People's Party, a broadly based, somewhat poorer, undemocratic institution (it has never held internal elections). The People's Party began as a rural socialist movement, led by Benazir Bhutto's father, who was hanged by the Army, and it has led national governments three times; when Bhutto returned to Pakistan from exile last month, her followers poured into Karachi to show that they can still rule the streets. The struggle between the Party and the Army, however, is not likely to produce a major transformation—the house arrests, tear-gas clouds, and baton charges are only the latest episode in the national narrative of political dysfunction.

More alarming is the low-grade civil war on Pakistan's western border, a conflict that is pitting the Army, dominated by ethnic Punjabis, against Islamists in the country's tribally organized Pashtun minority, a deeply conservative people who helped repel the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, and gave birth to the Taliban. The latest Pashtun uprising, which is also directed at secular Pakistani politicians and their Western allies, began several years ago. Taliban irredentism and proselytizing by a regrouping Al Qaeda leadership, presumably including Osama bin Laden himself, were among the causes. But antipathy toward the United States, the scheming of Pakistani intelligence officers and, perhaps, senior Army officers, who have long succored Pashtun Islamists, and, crucially, Musharraf's persistent inability to build a political coalition of Pashtun allies who could help contain the Islamists also played a part.

Musharraf's miscalculations were abetted by the United States, which until recently all but ignored the political aspects of counterinsurgency in Pashtun territory. The Bush Administration, distracted by the war in Iraq, and conditioned by its long dependence on Pakistan's Army, outsourced its Pakistan policy to Musharraf and bankrolled his narrow, increasingly self-defeating strategies. Of the approximately ten billion dollars in overt funds delivered to Pakistan since September 11th, for example, less than a hundred million has gone toward education, an issue about which Musharraf has spoken often but done very little.

The Pakistani Army's intermittent attempts to suppress the Pashtun Islamists have failed, and these reversals have recently produced stresses within the military not witnessed since the country broke in half, in 1971: the humiliating surrender and capture of hundreds of Pakistani soldiers and local Pashtun paramilitaries, which have led to prisoner exchanges with the Taliban; reports of desertion and mutiny; and a succession of demoralizing battlefield defeats. About fifteen per cent of Pakistan's Army officers are Pashtun, and the danger of revolt or division among them is deepening. Suicide bombings, emanating principally from the tribal areas—such as the one that claimed a hundred and forty lives at Bhutto's rally in Karachi—now occur regularly in cities and towns that had little previous experience of them. They have also created havoc in Afghanistan, where Pashtuns make up about half the population.

The Bush Administration belatedly supported Bhutto's return—it was encouraged if not altogether persuaded by the idea that she might help Musharraf construct a more plausible political strategy against the Islamists. The People's Party has only a limited following among Pashtuns, but if Bhutto and Musharraf could construct an alignment of secular-leaning leaders and political formations, the theory went, they might strengthen the country's moderate mainstream, provide cover in the West for the Army's unpopular counterinsurgency campaign, and create new pathways for pacifying Taliban sympathizers. That plan is now kaput—one more crumpled draft of the Bush Administration's halfhearted, do-over second-term foreign policy. It is difficult to imagine that Musharraf will ever recover the political strength necessary to govern the country. Not surprisingly, neither the General nor President Bush seems to be aware of this.

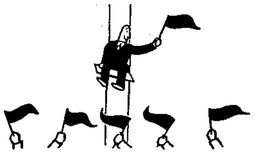
Sometimes, the clues to a forthcoming catastrophe can be found in plain sight. This was the case with Musharraf's memoir, which the General promoted on Jon Stewart's "Daily Show" during a postmodern, funny-if-it-weren't-scary author's tour. In addition to passages about pets and bodybuilding, Musharraf delivered in the book an extended reflection on the nature of command, in which he relied upon quotations from Richard Nixon's neglected tome "Leaders." "A leader must understand his environment in all its intricacy," Musharraf wrote:

> He must always have a finger on the pulse of the times. . . . A true leader will always be loved by his people. They will be prepared to follow him not because of his rank and position but because of their respect and esteem for him.

Cue the helicopter warming up its rotors on the President's back lawn.

—*Steve Coll*

ON CAMPUS
AWESOME RON



The president of the Columbia College Libertarians, Mathieu Gordon, Class of 2008, says that he has watched dozens of video clips featuring the antiwar Republican Presidential candidate Ron Paul. Gordon has so deeply absorbed Paul's message of non-intervention that he has decided not to contribute to Paul's campaign. "You don't really have the right to get involved in another country's politics," Gordon, who is British, said at a club meeting last week, after Paul's supporters raised four million dollars in a single day, surpassing Mitt Romney's record. "I suppose I should really support Hillary Clinton, because she'll impose loads of taxes and all the businesses will come to London."

It was fall break, and there were six libertarians in attendance, down from the usual ten. All were men, and all had seen the movie "V for Vendetta," in which the British holiday Guy Fawkes Day figures prominently. Fawkes, a Catholic rebel who tried to assassinate King James I in 1605, has become an unlikely inspiration for Ron Paul fans, who used the recent anniversary of Fawkes's failed attempt at terrorism to stage their one-day fund-raising blitz—a "money bomb," according to the organizers' Web site, ThisNovember5th.com. "It gets quite confusing," Gordon said. "On a date that's meant to be anti the guy who's anti-Parliament, the idea here is to be giving money to someone who's anti-Parliament."

"The important part is that it worked," Russell Whitaker, a junior and a biochemistry major, said. Whitaker was wearing a black "Ron Paul Revolution" sweatshirt, and showed off his copy of Paul's book "Freedom Under Siege: the U.S. Constitution after 200-plus Years," which was signed by Paul in 1988 ("back when he had black hair") and again last month, at a party on West Twenty-ninth Street. On another night, the libertarians—who fancy themselves a kind of informal debating society—might have been discussing the gold standard and the Federal Reserve, or the differences between the Chicago and the Austrian schools of economics, but the primary topic of this meeting was, as a physics grad student who was wearing suspenders put it, "Why is Ron Paul awesome?" They compared notes on favorite YouTube videos: the Bill Maher interview, the dorm-room guy, the stripper girl ("Oh, yeah, *everybody's* seen her"), the "Morton Downey Jr. Show." To help make the case for awesomeness, among the fellow-travellers cited were Dennis Kucinich, Ayn Rand, Howard Dean, Barry Goldwater, Eugene V. Debs, Ronald Reagan, Eugene McCarthy, and Robert A. Heinlein.

"The thing about Ron Paul is, there is nothing spectacular about Ron Paul the man," Adam Sparks, a bearded senior, said. "He's the most boring little old man from Texas who has these laughs that make him look like a Muppet sometimes." He added, "I was completely politically apathetic before Ron Paul." Sparks is the founder of a Facebook group, Columbians for Ron Paul. "I don't know why people can't rally behind someone who actually does want to lower your taxes," he said.

Unlike most college students, Whitaker, who is forty-one, is a full-time wage earner, and therefore a real taxpayer. He works as a software engineer at Google, in addition to his coursework. "I'm a Navy veteran myself and I think that war sucks," he said. He considers himself an anarcho-capitalist, although he recently registered as a Republican, so that he could cast a ballot—his first—for Paul in the New York primary next year. "It's a historical event in my life, but I didn't really want to go and hang out with Republicans," Whitaker said. "They're a little bit too starched and old-boy network for me." He has been known on occasion to socialize with Hillary Clinton supporters.

"If Ron Paul doesn't win, the only way to solve this ever-increasing spiral of government involvement is to start a new nation and put even stricter checks and balances in place," Sparks said.

"Except you can't go west any farther," Gordon said.

"NASA's starting a moon base in 2020," Sparks said. "We can have a three-man country."

—Ben McGrath

CHECK, PLEASE DEPT.
NO SECONDS

Late-night conversation has a tendency to go existential: ghost stories, God talks, rounds of "Would You Rather?" involving death by drowning or, alternatively, by fire. Chefs, a new book asserts, have their own tradition of nocturnal morbidity. Anthony Bourdain explains, in an introduction:

> After their kitchens had closed, sitting at a wobbly table on the periphery of Les Halles in nineteenth-century Paris and drinking vin ordinaire, or while nibbling bits of chicken from skewers in the after-hours *izakayas* in Tokyo, or perched at the darkened bar of a closed New York City restaurant . . . someone always piped up: "If you were to die tomorrow, what single dish, what one mouthful of food from anywhere in the world or anytime in your life, would you choose as your last?"

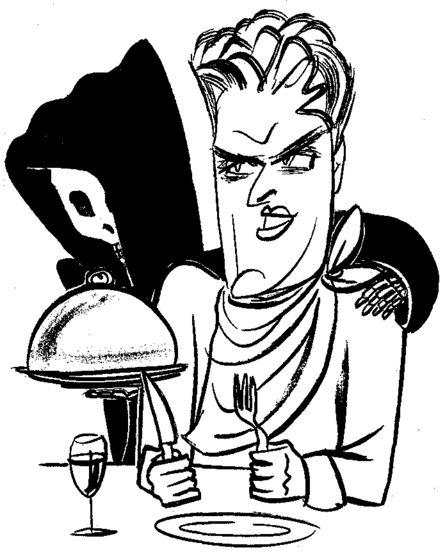
The book, a coffee-table number by the photographer Melanie Dunea, is called "My Last Supper," after the game. It features portraits of fifty chefs, each of whom replied to a questionnaire about his or her fantasy final meal. Truffles are a frequently requested palliative: thirteen respondents wouldn't go without a fix, whether white, black, shaved, coarsely grated, wrapped in thin slices of salt pork, served with grilled-shirako risotto, or minced on toast. Caviar (ten mentions) and foie gras (seven) are also popular, as are the humbler condiments cracked pepper (three) and sea salt (six), often accompanying bread, which, in its various forms—baguette, rye, Pullman loaf—seems to be the most beloved foodstuff of all. Duck fat is big. So is sea urchin, an aphrodisiac. Whiskey comes up a few times. Blowfish is mentioned just once, by Masa Takayama. He craves clear blowfish soup with temomi-somen noodles, wild-blowfish sashimi with liver, fried blowfish cheeks, and a pudding made with blowfish testicles. Oh, and it would be great if Mozart could perform live.

Dunea got the idea for the project after photographing several chefs for magazine assignments. "They were up for anything," she said recently. Judging from the roster she managed to assemble, mostly by cold-calling restaurants—"I just got on the phone and said, 'Hey, what's the e-mail of the chef?' "—she is correct. Still, the responses were unpredictable. "Who picks ratatouille?" Dunea asked, referring to Michel Richard's request. "I never would've thought that Jacques Pépin would choose a hot dog. A lot of them wanted to be on the beach or near water. I guess it's the opposite of the kitchen—airy, calm." (Daniel Boulud, however, has made an advance reservation for the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.)

The chefs weren't given any constraints on how to describe their farewell feasts, and the entries, printed word for word, provide as illuminating a glimpse into their psyches as they do into their stomachs. The group's traditionalists emerge (Gordon Ramsay calls for a classic roast dinner), as do sentimentalists ("No froufrou French. No snout-to-tail. No fucking foie gras," Tyler Florence writes, of his wish for the "classic Southern feast of my childhood"), romantics (Martin Picard: "It would be set in the forest during fall. . . . This is the time for hunting white-tailed deer and finding vast fields of maple trees where you can feel free and no one owns anything"), light travellers (Nobu asks simply for twelve pieces of sushi and a cucumber roll), diehard self-promoters (Laurent Tourondel: "To be honest, I would have the tuna BLT sandwich from the menu at BLT Fish Shack"), and you-can't-take-it-with-yous (Gary Danko envisions a "delicious and awesome festival" set on the banks of a lake in Udaipur, and featuring eunuchs, platform beds, and fifteen wines, including a Nebuchadnezzar of Krug champagne from 1947). Neil Perry and Chui Lee Luk both long for mud crabs; Charlie Trotter wants to listen to Miles Davis, as does

Marcus Samuelsson, who would invite Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

The eerie thing about the exercise, of course, is its exceptionalism: the eater can have anything he wants, for the first time ever, but only because he can never have it again. This is the thinking behind the ghoulish ritual of the last meal that is offered to the condemned, a convention, apparently, since the time of the ancients. (More recently, Ali G asked Richard Thornburgh, the former Attorney General, if a death-row inmate could put off execution indefinitely by requesting an all-you-can-eat buffet.) Richard Dieter, the executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center, regards the tying together of food and death as a distraction tactic. He said, over the telephone, "The taking of a human life is too daunting a prospect to accept on its own, so we surround it with a lot of ritual."

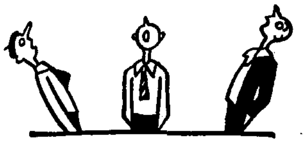


Eric Ripert

Eric Ripert, who cooked for Dunea's book party (black-bass tartare, poached white tuna, spiny lobster curry, stuffed capon, hazelnut financier, and a heavenly chocolate pot de crème), at his restaurant, Le Bernardin, said that he considers the custom comforting: "A last meal means a little bit of time to say goodbye and the luxury of thinking, in the last minute, what is essential to yourself." He volunteered that he would welcome the opportunity to cook for a death-row prisoner. "You are not going to mess up the last meal," he said softly. "You must be so careful, giving for the last time something to somebody."

—*Lauren Collins*

UP ON THE ROOF HOOPERS



Two months ago, the German artist Christian Jankowski was making coffee in his eighth-floor apartment, on Division Street, when something out the window caught his eye: a woman, dressed in a tank top and shorts, hula-hooping on a rooftop. "There was something very peaceful in this movement, something hypnotic almost," he said later. "Within the boxes of the city, you had this circular hula hoop." Jankowski had been contemplating a commission for Performa 07, a festival of performance-based visual art. He recalled, "I thought, This is a great inspiration, thank you."

Jankowski set out to find his muse, whom he referred to as Mystery Woman. He drew up a sign, which he posted on the front door of her building, on Ludlow Street, announcing an open call for hula hoopers. (He didn't mention anything about the rooftop, worrying that it might get her in trouble with her landlord.) No response. Later, he caught a young man on his way out of the building and asked him if he knew anyone inside who hula-hooped. "Yes, my aunt," the boy said. The boy's aunt attested that she did indeed hula-hoop, but not on the roof. However, she had an idea who did—the woman in Apartment 12. With the help of a bilingual assistant, Beatrice Glow, Jankowski returned with a letter, written in both English and Chinese, which he fastened to Mystery Woman's door. ("Dear neighbor! I am an artist producing a hula-hoop performance for New York City. Your routine was an inspiration for me and I would like to meet you.") Hours later, she was on the phone.

Mystery Woman turned out to be Suat Ling Chua, an immigrant from Malaysia who works as a manicurist at a spa on Grand Street. Her rainbow-colored hula hoop had been a gift, and in the course of a year of rooftop gyrating she had lost more than thirty pounds. Jankowski described to Chua what he had in mind: he would invite an audience to the roof of his building, where they would watch her perform her usual workout across the street. Gradually, other hula hoopers would appear on surrounding rooftops, creating a convergence of surreal imagery, choreography, and calisthenics. The piece would be titled "Rooftop Routine."

To Jankowski's surprise, Chua agreed. "When I first saw Christian, I feel he is very nice. Very respect," she said recently, over dim-sum takeout at Jankowski's apartment. "I thought, He is different." Then Chua used a word that sounded like *yuan*, and Glow explained that it signifies "the concept that certain people are meant to find each other."

Despite the *yuan* factor, not everyone was comfortable with Chua's foray into the art scene. She said, "I tell my customers I meet an art person. And they say, 'Be careful! Don't go alone with him!' I call my brother. My brother say, 'Don't go!' My brother say art people are crazy."

The next steps for Jankowski and Glow were finding volunteers (they picked up several at a hula-hooping class at the Fourteenth Street Y) and persuading local building owners to allow access to their roofs, which was not always successful. ("Some of them were angry about gentrification," Glow said.) Nevertheless, by the day of the performance they had secured twenty-five rooftops, running from Eldridge to Essex Streets. It was a crisp morning. About fifty people, many of them wearing flamboyant scarves and newly exhumed winter coats, gathered on Jankowski's rooftop. According to the artist, Chua had got a little nervous about doing her routine in front of an audience. "She had a dream two nights ago that her hula hoop broke," he said. "Can you imagine?" Suddenly, a figure in a red Adidas jacket and matching pants materialized in the distance: Chua.

The audience scanned the skyline and began pointing out the other hula hoopers. ("Nineteen! Twenty!") Jankowski ran back from the south side of the rooftop, looking giddy. "There's an unplanned hula hooper!" he said. "She's not one of us!" The crowd peered over the railing. In a courtyard below, a woman in a black warmup suit had stepped outside for her morning workout, unaware that she had entered the realm of conceptual art. Several people on Jankowski's rooftop snapped her picture.

—*Michael Schulman*

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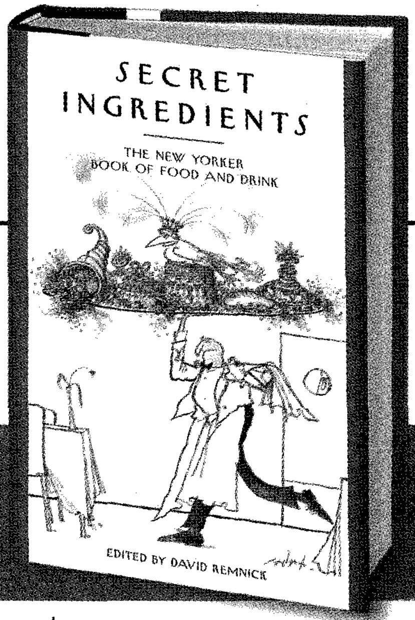

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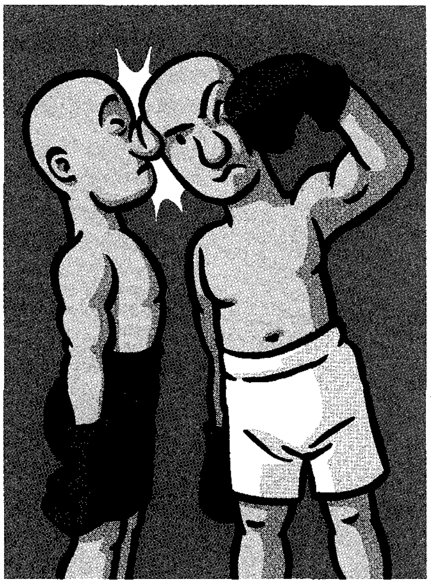
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
STRIKING OUT

In the spring of 1988, television and movie writers went on strike. The strike, which lasted for twenty-two weeks, was rhetorically bitter and economically destructive: it cost an estimated half billion dollars in lost revenues and wages and sent network ratings down by nine per cent. But the walkout had only limited impact at the negotiating table: when an agreement was finally reached, it looked very much like a deal that could have been made five months earlier. The strike almost certainly cost both sides more than the sums they had been fighting over.

Twenty years later, entertainment writers are on the picket lines once again. They may do better this time, but history is against them. Walkouts may call to mind labor triumphs like the Flint sit-down strike of 1936-37, which gained union recognition for the United Automobile Workers at G.M., but most don't end that well—nor do they generally end as badly as the 1981 air-traffic controllers' strike, in which everyone got fired. Instead, strikes often end tepidly, with no major gains or rollbacks, and economists have found that, on average, strikes these days have little, if any, impact on what workers get paid. (Paradoxically, unions raise worker wages, but strikes generally don't.) Given the negative economic consequences—lost paychecks for workers and lost business for employers—the economically rational thing for both sides is usually to settle before the walkout starts. So why don't they?

One obvious hurdle to a settlement is that neither side knows what the other's true position is. In economists' terms, strikes happen as a result of "asymmetric information"—when one side knows more than the other about the real economics of the situation. Entertainment writers, for instance, want a share of the revenue generated from their work in new media, including programs streamed on the Internet. Producers insist that they need flexibility with regard to new technologies and that it's too early to know how much they can afford to pay for streaming programs. This may be just a bluff, or it may contain some truth—it's hard for the writers to know the difference. Going on strike is one way to find out. If a company concedes quickly, that's a sign that it was just bluffing. If it's willing to endure a long strike, that may be a sign that it meant what it said. That's why the longer a strike lasts, the less likely it is to produce a big victory for either side: you're willing to cut a deal after a long strike that you wouldn't have been willing to cut before in part because the strike has told you that the other side wasn't just bluffing.

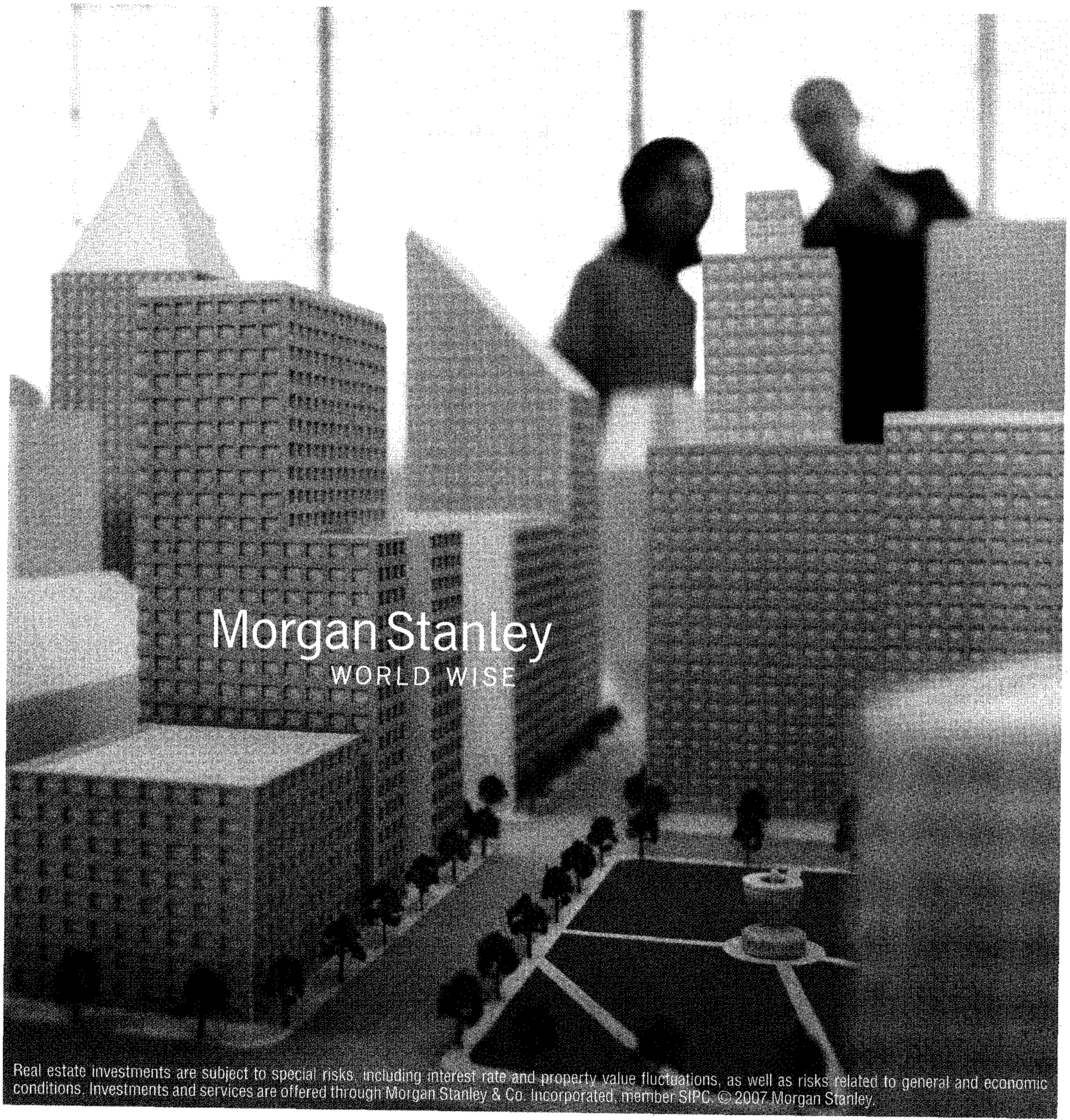
Even if negotiators are acting in good faith, it's still hard to settle. Both sides, to begin with, are likely overestimating their chances of victory, thanks to the well-documented tendency people have toward overconfidence. A strike isn't always a mistake: sometimes workers do win big. But if both sides think a strike will help their cause at least one of them must be wrong. Overconfidence also exacerbates what the economists Linda Babcock and George Loewenstein call "self-serving bias"—the tendency for self-interest to warp our perceptions. In one famous study from the nineteen-fifties, people were asked to watch a Princeton-Dartmouth football game and count the number of penalties they saw committed. Princeton fans saw Dartmouth commit twice as many flagrant fouls as Dartmouth fans did. As the researchers put it, each group of students appeared to be watching "a different game." Similarly, Babcock, Loewenstein, and some colleagues ran an experiment in which people were assigned to the side of the plaintiff or the defendant in a tort case and then asked to analyze the case and simply predict what the judge's award in the case would be. Everyone looked at the same evidence. Yet those on the plaintiff's side predicted a much bigger award than those on the other side did. The way one sees the facts, in other words, is literally shaped by the outcome one desires. So while the networks may be spinning when they claim that showing programs over the Internet (for which writers usually don't get paid) is completely different from showing programs on TV (for which writers do), they may simply have convinced themselves that their cause is just.



And justice matters quite a bit in strikes, which often turn more on questions of fairness than on strict economics. Fairness doesn't matter much in conventional economics, which assumes that, if you and I can make a deal leaving us both better off, we'll make it. But, in the real world, if the deal seems unfair to me I may very well reject it, even if doing so leaves me worse off. The quintessential example of this is the so-called ultimatum game, where participants offered a share of a ten-dollar bill by a fellow-participant will actually turn down the free money if they think their share isn't big enough. In the same way, a capuchin monkey who's being rewarded for working with another monkey will often refuse to participate if she sees her partner get a better reward. And in a series of experiments run by the economists Simon Gaechter and Ernst Fehr people prove willing to pay in order to punish those who act unfairly. Readiness to pay a price in order to enforce an idea of what is right is part of what keeps sides from settling: writers accept the loss of paychecks because they believe they deserve a cut of the revenue from their work, and producers accept the loss of business because they believe that TV shows and movies are their property. The paychecks and the profit-and-loss statements may indicate that the writers and the producers should be able to resolve their dispute quickly. But in labor relations the bottom line isn't always the bottom line.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



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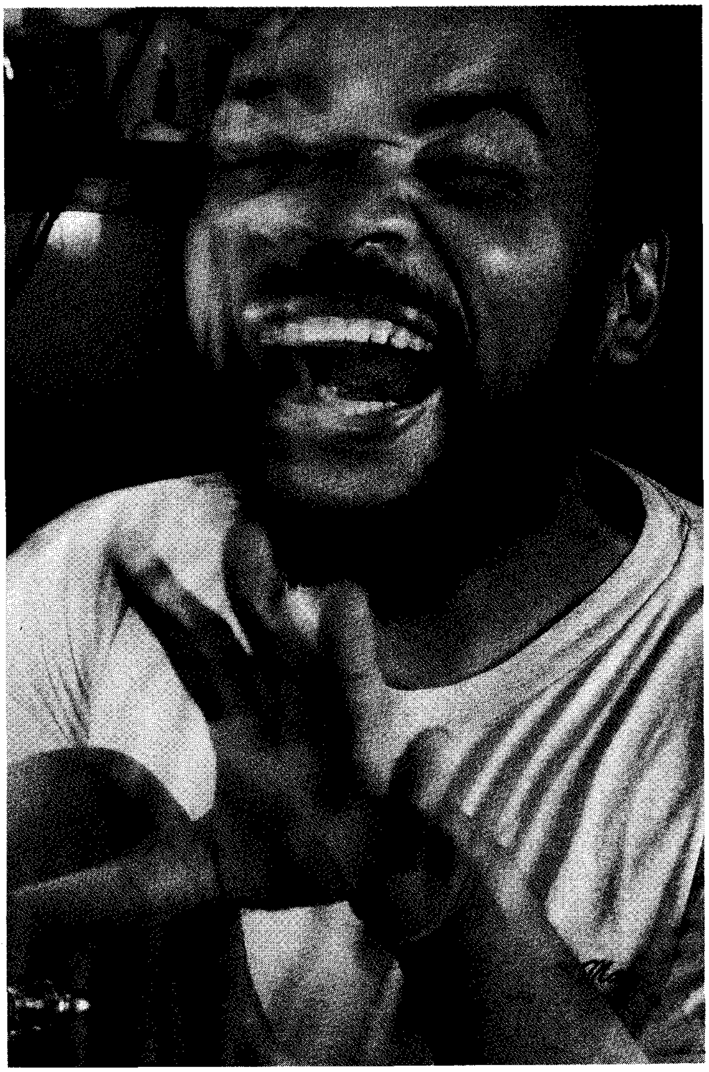
LETTER FROM PARIS

LAUGH RIOTS

The French star who became a demagogue.

BY TOM REISS



Once liberal, Dieudonné is now a vocal anti-Semite. Photograph by William Klein.

One day last March, on the stage of a theatre in central Paris, a light-skinned black man named Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala sat with his hands clasped over his knees. Next to him, smiling into the lights, was Jany Le Pen, the wife of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of France's far-right and xenophobic party, the National Front. Dieudonné (he is known only by his first name) is one of France's most successful comedians—once viewed as something of a cross between Lenny Bruce and Sacha Baron Cohen. In recent years, though, his political career has overshadowed his comedy, and he has won a reputation as a committed and vocal anti-Semite. In October, 2006, he dropped out of the 2007 Presidential campaign, after running on an anti-Zionist, "utopian-anarchist" ticket.

The event with Madame Le Pen had been announced on Les Ogres, the Web site that publishes his news and airs videos on him. (The name is an acronym for "geographic, religious, ethnic, and social overtures.") The son of a Cameroonese father and a white French mother, Dieudonné had just returned from Cameroon, where he had filmed with Madame Le Pen their encounters with that country's suffering Baka Pygmy population. The room was filled with journalists from France's main newspapers and television stations.

In the film, Dieudonné and Madame Le Pen, who is in her seventies, are shown trekking through the jungle and holding malnourished Pygmy children in their arms; in one segment they pay for medical treatment for twin girls. After the film, Dieudonné spoke about the plight of the Pygmies—the "little elves of the forest"—who, he said, were victims of a "genocide" being carried out by the logging industry. In addition to the logging trucks, "there is a crossbreeding that amounts to a rape of the Pygmies, the most ancient civilization in the world," he said, apparently referring to intermarriage between Pygmies and other Cameroonians. (Pygmies number nearly forty thousand in Cameroon, or about a quarter of one per cent of its population.) "I propose to bring seven Pygmies here to France to meet the different Presidential candidates and ask them some questions." He looked sternly at the crowd.

Dieudonné is not known for his stance on this indigenous people and their troubles. Rather, he is known for turning the most unlikely cause into a vehicle for attacking Jews. Some of his references to the deforestation of the Pygmies' lands were apparently allusions to Bernard-Henri Lévy, the Jewish writer and commentator known as BHL, who is the heir to France's second-largest lumber fortune and who has become one of Dieudonné's fiercest critics. Two years ago, before the comic publicly associated with members of the National Front but well into his anti-Semitic phase, Lévy wrote, in his weekly column in *Le Point*, "Le Pen only had daughters. . . . Well, this has been rectified. Time, that benevolent mother, is giving him sons—finally one, in any case, Dieudonné."

Dressed in black jeans and stylish hiking boots, Dieudonné paced back and forth across the stage, hunching his shoulders with a caged, muscular energy. Journalists shouted questions across the political spectrum, and Dieudonné replied calmly, “Each person has his own political criterion. For some, it is unemployment; for others, security. For me, it will be Pygmies.”

In February, Dieudonné had spent a “resistance weekend” (resistance to the Zionist conspiracy, that is) in Tehran, where he was interviewed on two television channels and expressed support for Iran’s nuclear program and for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s opposition to American hegemony. His political career is a source of consternation to many in France—among them former friends and colleagues. “I knew Dieudonné a few years ago, and he was a gentleman—very funny, very witty, ironic, very wise,” Ariel Wizman, a popular French d.j. who also hosts “Idées Fortes,” a current-events talk show, told me. “Lots of things would come out of his mouth that were intellectually and morally challenging, as well as hilarious. I can’t explain what happened to Dieudo except for deep psychological problems combined with the fact that once he came out this way, went down this road, it was impossible to go back.”

By the late nineteen-nineties, Dieudonné had made enough money from show business to buy the Théâtre de la Main d’Or. For six years, until 1997, his stage and television partner was Elie Semoun, a Jewish comic and a childhood friend; their act parodied bigotry of all sorts. Wizman recalled that when he first knew Dieudonné he would “make fun of racism from both sides—to develop a really sophisticated, witty position.”

Dieudonné signalled his “conversion” in early 2002, in two separate magazine interviews, in which he remarked that he preferred “the charisma of bin Laden to that of George Bush” and that Judaism is “a scam. It’s one of the worst, because it’s the first.” His comments were initially taken as bizarre satire, absurdist politics à la Stephen Colbert, but it gradually became clear that Dieudonné meant what he said. No one knows why he developed this obsession. Many of his critics speculate that he used anti-Semitism as a way to increase his wealth and fame, but this seems unlikely, since he was at the peak of his career before his political “coming out,” and his extreme positions seem to have cost him many mainstream film and television roles.

Pierre-André Taguieff, a French specialist on racism, told me that Dieudonné

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“Yoga made you cranky, meditation made you anxious, but driving the hybrid you have found yourself, Walter.”

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in some ways reminds him of Céline, who, in 1937, "sensed something in the air, coming partly from abroad, from Germany and other parts of Europe, and partly from France—a feeling that anti-Semitism was becoming a strong cause, with a broad resonance, across the political spectrum. I think Dieudonné sensed a similar thing in 2001 to 2002, after the second intifada." He went on, "I think our Dieudonné has quite a keen intuition for the movements of public opinion, and he immediately sought to instrumentalize this creeping anti-Semitism in public opinion by bringing it into his sketches, as a popular provocation, as a means of connecting with people on a visceral level. Dieudonné is a provocateur; he exists through provocation." Whatever the motivation, the charges of anti-Semitism moved him from the entertainment section to the front pages.

Dieudonné's new stance coincided with the greatest increase in anti-Semitic violence in France since the Second World War. Since 2002, there has been a wave of attacks against Jewish "persons or property" in France, a great many of them committed by young men living outside Paris, in the vast ghettos called *les banlieues*. Dieudonné is a folk hero in these neighborhoods, which are populated largely by black and Arab immigrants—places where anti-Semitism is fed by secondhand Palestinian politics, Islamism, and alienation from French society. How much Dieudonné has done to ride (or to create) this wave has been a popular topic in France.

France, with a population of about sixty million, has the world's third-largest Jewish population—about half a million. Nowhere else except the United States and Israel (which have a combined Jewish population of more than ten million) do Jews play as prominent a role in cultural, business, and political affairs. France has had Jewish Prime Ministers, like Léon Blum and Pierre Mendès-France, and the current top ranks of French politics include Jewish politicians such as Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the former finance minister; Laurent Fabius, the former Prime Minister; and Nicolas Sarkozy, France's President, whose grandfather was Jewish. Until 2005, France had the only senior Catholic prelate in modern times who was born Jewish and still considered himself culturally Jewish, Cardinal Lustiger. The Jewish exodus from North Africa, in the late nineteen-fifties and the nineteen-sixties, brought hundreds of thousands of Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian Jews to France.

France had long been seen as a promised land for Jews, even as it was also a center of world anti-Semitism. The Action Française, the right-wing movement that emerged from the Dreyfus Affair, in which a Jewish Army captain was falsely accused of spying, and its descendant, the National Front, are seen as the natural home of French anti-Semitism. But the left has its own problematic history, going back to the French Revolution, when Jews provoked hostility for keeping their religious identity while accepting full citizenship in accord with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Dieudonné's anti-Semitism draws more from the left tradition: his attacks on Jewish capitalism mimic the worst tics of French socialism (even the revered socialist leader Jean Jaurès once wrote that the Jewish race "is consumed by a sort of fever for profit when it is not by the fever for prophesy"). And though Dieudonné attacks all "religious superstition" in his shows, he echoes Voltaire in singling out Jewish rituals and beliefs.

"Dieudonné is the spokesman, the godfather, the icon of a new kind of anti-Semitism," Alain Finkielkraut, the philosopher and memoirist of Jewish identity, told me. "It is an explicitly anti-racist anti-Semitism, which inverts traditional anti-Semitism by asserting that the Nazis today are in fact the Jews. The idiom of anti-Semitism is no longer racism; it is now *anti*-racism. Dieudonné's followers say that they don't hate Jews, they hate Jewish racism. They say that Israel is like Nazism, like apartheid."

For fifty years, debates about French anti-Semitism mainly revolved around France's record during the Second World War, when the Vichy government collaborated with the Germans. (Roughly seventy-five per cent of France's Jewish population survived the Holocaust.) Marcel Ophuls's 1969 film, "The Sorrow and the Pity," and the trials of high-ranking French officials brought about a public recognition of France's role; in 1995, President Jacques Chirac ended a half century of official silence by acknowledging French responsibility in the roundup of nearly thirteen thousand Jews—more than four thousand of them children—for deportation to Auschwitz in July, 1942. This gesture was seen as an important step, but some now believe that it helped launch a new generation of racial discord—a competition of historical grievances against the state.

Yet Dieudonné's humor is rooted in an intense, anthropological examination of French society that goes far beyond mocking Jews. A brilliant mimic, he manages to transform himself, in a few deft gestures, into dozens of characters. His shows, which are usually sold out, aren't primarily attended by young minority men or skinhead rabble-rousers but by hip middle-class white Parisians; many seem to be couples.

In his current show, Dieudonné satirizes human-rights organizations like S.O.S. Racisme—a French group that he once supported but now dismisses as "S.O.S. Zionism." He plays a bored operator for an "S.O.S. Endangered Species" hot line taking calls from a panda, a butterfly, and a harpooned whale: "I know that it hurts to be harpooned; you don't need to scream! They have no right to do so, you're a protected species . . . they're reeling you in? Well, *refuse*, ma'am! Refuse!" Another routine portrays a high-school parent-teacher conference about the controversial 2004 law banning religious garb, including Muslim head scarves, in French public schools. The ethnic impersonations are all intended to offend, but as Monsieur Blumenthal, a Jewish student's father, Dieudonné is pure malevolence: "When this young girl, obviously from Hezbollah, dons her cheap fabric, this veil of bin Laden, what is her objective? Nothing less than the extermination of an entire population! And that will never happen again, do you hear me?" Fingering a gold chain on his wrist, Monsieur Blumenthal proposes a "big campaign to combat anti-Semitism" that would include blinking anti-Auschwitz pins and "a DVD that will be given to every student, for free, which only lasts nine hours, so the kids will be able to look at it on Saturdays, on national holidays, and during their vacations." ("Shoah," the 1985 Holocaust documentary by the French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, is nine hours long, though the DVD version that he distributes in the French public-school system contains only excerpts.)

When I met with Dieudonné for the first time, in March, at a Starbucks, he explained his longtime fascination with the Code Noir, an edict issued by Louis XIV, in 1685, outlining the rules of slavery in the French colonial empire. "Fortunes were made in the slave trade that are taboo subjects today," he said. He noted that the King had, in the first article of the code, banned Jews from participating. Why would he do so, Dieudonné asked, "if it were not because they were very involved in the trade?" I asked him if he had a problem with Jews. He replied that he had no problem with individual Jews, but "if you are French and attached to the philosophy of the Enlightenment—the universal—you do not recognize this border" between groups.

Dieudonné was born in Fontenay-aux-Roses, outside Paris, in 1966, and grew up in the city's middle-class southern suburbs. His father, an accountant, lived in Cameroon, and Dieudonné was brought up by his mother (his parents divorced when he was one); she made instructional videos on safety in the workplace. He attended Catholic school, though his mother was a New Age Buddhist. As a teen-ager, he was adept at judo and played the piano and the jazz saxophone in the style of Parker and Coltrane. He knew from a young age that he wanted to be a comedian, and after getting his baccalaureate (in computer science) he began writing and practicing routines with his childhood pal Semoun. They performed in local cafés and bars, while Dieudonné worked as a salesman—cars, telephones, photocopy machines. In 1992, a Paris comedian spotted them and helped them stage their first professional show.

By 1994, Elie and Dieudo—"the crazed little Jew and the big mysterious black man," as the newspaper *Le Parisien* described them—were famous. Their act, a multicultural, *banlieue* version of Laurel and Hardy, was a satire of the life of the French underclass, in which they played a pair of gun-and-knife-wielding delinquents, as well as the local cops, the two-faced journalists, and the intellectuals in black-framed glasses called in to comment on moral decline and social alienation. Elie and Dieudo also parodied Scientologists, neo-Nazis, and the Foreign Legion. After a six-month, sold-out run at the Palais des Glaces and an international tour, in 1996, the pair split—one source suggested that the cause was a financial dispute—but a year later they worked together in a film called "Le Clone."

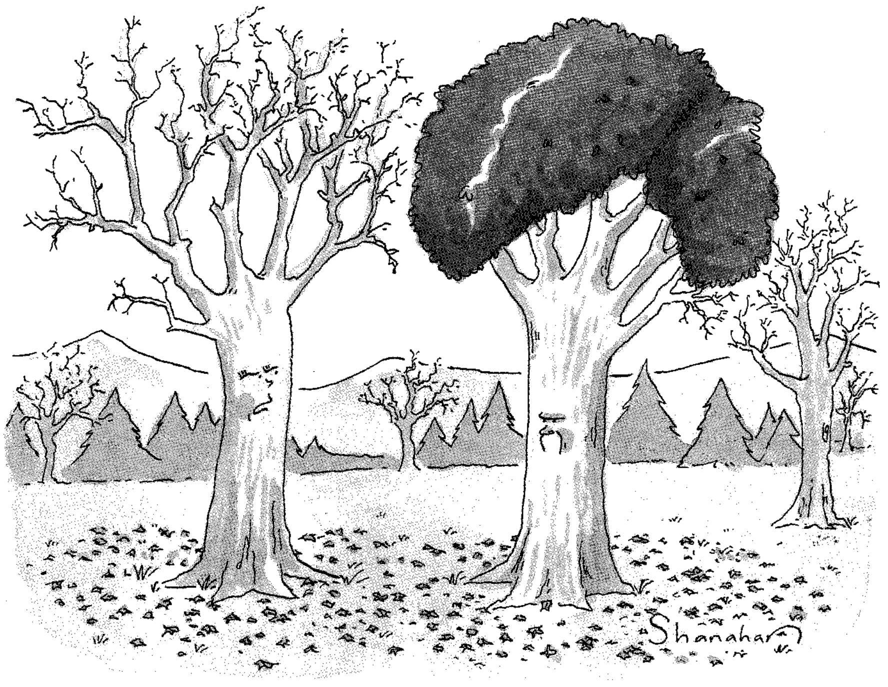
During the first years of his solo career, Dieudonné continued to parody racism, performing all over France. He also appeared in several movies, with actresses such as Emmanuelle Béart; his favorite role, he told me, was playing a gay proctologist who was the lover of Claude Rich in the cross-dressing 1999 comedy "Le Derrière." Dieudonné entered politics in 1997, when he ran for the National Assembly in the Dreux district. He declared that his main purpose was to fight the racist influence of the National Front, whose first electoral victory took place in Dreux in 1983, when it won control of the city council. Dieudonné won only eight per cent of the vote, but that showing contributed to the defeat of the National Front candidate. In 1997, he and Catherine Deneuve sponsored a proposal for a youth project in Dreux, and in 2000 he was designated an honorary Ambassador of Good Will in the Fight Against Racism by the United Nations.

The beginning of *l'affaire Dieudonné* came in December, 2003, when he appeared on "You Can't Please Everyone," a popular political talk show, in which celebrities discussed issues in a civil round-table atmosphere. To the surprise of everyone there, he arrived on the set wearing a camo jacket, a black ski mask, and an Orthodox Jewish hat with fake sidelocks. He launched into a speech that called on the audience to join "the Americano-Zionist Axis—the only one . . . that offers you happiness, and the only one to give you a chance of living a little bit longer." While the panel of comedians invited for the show (it included Jamel Debbouze, France's most popular Muslim comic) laughed, the show's host, Marc-Olivier Fogiel, looked on nervously. Dieudonné finished his polemic by raising his arm and crying, "Isra-heil." He then took off his mask and joined the panel, to a standing ovation.

In France, civil-rights laws focus more on hate speech than on discrimination; the French government and Jewish groups sued Dieudonné for "defamation of a racial nature." Dieudonné countered with a suit against his host, Fogiel, contending that a text message that appeared on-screen on the show the following week—it read, "Dieudo, will you find sketches on the smell of blacks funny?"—was itself racist, and won. The affair escalated. On February 5th, firemen in Lyon evacuated a thousand people from a Dieudonné performance after a smoke bomb was thrown; the event caused theatres in several other cities to cancel performances. Thousands of fans marched in protest.

Dieudonné's former partner, Elie

"Your mother wasn't supposed to give you away, but you're back now, and that's all that matters."



"Believe me, I can tell."

• •

Semoun, published an open letter to Dieudonné in the newspaper *Libération,* in February, 2004: "Hi Buffoon!" it began, and continued, "It's the little Jew . . . writing to you to tell you that I like you and that you are hurting me . . . you are no longer the person whom I knew and with whom I laughed like I never could with anyone else. . . . You and me, we made fun of everyone, people loved it . . . but that's why I feel so betrayed, you are not the same Dieudo." Dieudonné's mother followed this with an open letter to Semoun: "I don't imagine for a second that you didn't understand the universal and humanistic vision that Dieudonné is expressing by ridiculing—in his own caustic way!—all the extreme identifications people hold to religions, races and politics."

Two months later, Dieudonné opened a show at the Main d'Or called "Mes Excuses," but those who thought he was going to apologize were mistaken. The curtain rose on a dark, smoky landscape more reminiscent of Beckett than of standup comedy. A choir could be heard, chanting dolefully, and then Dieudonné staggered onto the stage. He was dressed in black and was almost invisible. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" he wailed. "I'm sorry, O Chosen People. Forgive the beast that I am, the offenses that I have caused, but I have no soul." He laughed and snarled. "My words are but meaningless grunts. They make no sense, no sense. I submit to your greatness, O Chosen People! Thank you for having spared me, master." He then suddenly snapped upright, one fist raised. "Fuck you up the ass, O master!" he shouted.

As Dieudonné proceeded to his multi-character sketches, the sound crew appeared onstage, surrounded by prison bars. The men, who were wearing the blue helmets of U.N. soldiers, pretended to monitor Dieudonné's jokes for unacceptable content. When he said the word "Palestinian," they shut off his microphone and explained their rules: the first time he pronounced that word, they would shut off the sound; the second time, they would turn out the lights; and the third time they would evacuate the theatre. Dieudonné declared that he'd been put under supervision and deemed unfit to express himself. It's Bernard Henri-Lévy and Alain Finkielkraut "who speak for me," he said.

Dieudonné gave two performances of "Mes Excuses" in Algeria in early 2005, and held a press conference at which he told his Algerian audience that those in power in France—here he specifically mentioned Jean-Pierre Rafarrin, the French Prime Minister—are forced to "lick the ass" of the C.R.I.F., France's main Jewish organization, and called the group "a Mafia that controls the republic." He also said that "the Zionist lobby cultivates the idea of their unique suffering," adding that "a war has been declared on blacks." A news report on the now defunct site, ProcheOrient.info, which quoted Dieudonné as referring to the Shoah as "memorial pornography," caused an uproar.

The French minister of justice, Dominique Perben, demanded an inquiry into Dieudonné's "contestation of crimes against humanity," and the Paris public prosecutor's office began an investigation. Upon his return to France, Dieudonné insisted that he had been misquoted and showed an excerpt of the conference to prove it. "I never made that statement, which is insulting to the memory of the Shoah and is against the law," he said, explaining that he was referring to the commemoration of the Holocaust rather than to the Holocaust itself. (On September 11th of this year, a Paris court found him guilty of complicity in slandering "a group of persons on the grounds of race, religion, or origin" and fined him nine thousand seven hundred dollars; neither Dieudonné nor his lawyer attended the proceeding.) There were more clashes with protesters, and when Dieudonné travelled to Martinique that spring he was assaulted at the airport by a small group of demonstrators, who he alleged were Israeli agents. His shows continued to sell out, and more performances were added to his tour.

From the stage of the Main d'Or, Dieudonné mocked his attackers. "Every time Bernard Lévy writes about me, it's 'Dieudonné, bastard!' 'Anti-Semite!' 'Anti-Semite!' As soon as anything annoys him—'Anti-Semite!' It's a great system, really." Dieudonné swatted an imaginary mosquito on his cheek, shouting, "Anti-Semite!"

Bernard-Henri Lévy's apartment on the Boulevard St. Germain reflects why, to the modern French anti-Semite, the initials "BHL" represent what the name Rothschild once did: the ultimate international Jew, running a global plot from the finest address in Paris.

"In France, being an anti-Semite in the old way does not work," Lévy said when I asked him about Dieudonné. "You will not raise a mass movement by saying the Jews killed Christ—nobody cares. Accuse them of having invented Christ, like Voltaire did in the eighteenth century, still nobody cares. As far as being a special race, nobody believes that anymore. But anti-racist anti-Semitism—saying that for the sake of the blacks, for the sake of the Arabs, we must make the Jews shut up—this works. If the Jews practiced 'memorial pornography'—thus exaggerating their own suffering—they became responsible for why the world didn't care enough about the history of slavery and the suffering of blacks. Dieudonné and his followers suppose that the capacity for empathy and the capacity for indignation is limited. But the brain doesn't work like this—you can care about the Holocaust *and* slavery. The more you are concerned by one, the more you are likely to be concerned by the other."

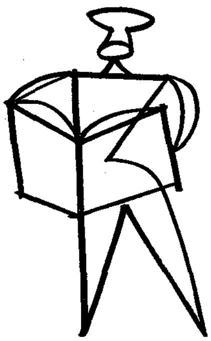
Philippe Val, an idiosyncratic hero of the French left and the editor of the biting satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo,* says that Dieudonné "pushes us to transgress the very basis of our culture and politics—the knowledge that we have constructed on the ruins of Auschwitz. We are constructed upon that. Modern European democracy started from there. If you want to tear it all apart, the ultimate destructive anarchist gesture, there is no better place to start."

As Dieudonné was ostracized by the mainstream media and the political establishment, he made new friends—people like Thierry Meyssan, the author of the much translated 2002 book "L'Effroyable Imposture" ("The Big Lie"), which suggests that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a plot hatched by elements of the U.S. military-industrial complex; Ginette Skandrani, a staunch Palestinian activist and a co-founder of France's Green Party; and Alain Soral, a writer for and adviser to Le Pen. Soral thought that by recruiting Dieudonné, a black celebrity, he could help break the National Front's image as a "whites only" party and appeal to a new constituency: Africans and Arabs from the *banlieue.*

"Dieudonné and I follow in the Voltairean French tradition of freethinking," Soral said when I met with him at the Café de la Mairie, on the Place Saint-Sulpice. Soral is an amateur boxer, and as we spoke he poked me in the chest to make his points. He furiously rubbed the Formica tabletop and cursed the state of France, the café, slobs—so much filth. "When a Jew tells you, 'We dominate the world,' you have to pretend that you didn't hear right, because if you say, 'Look, he told me over coffee that he dominated the world,' you go to prison." Soral went on, "Dieudonné and I fight for French independence, democracy, freedom. People can speak about these things only in private, but so many people think like I do."

As if on cue, a man who had been sitting in a booth nearby got up and said, "Gentlemen, I just want to say that for the last hour you have been saying what so many of us feel in our bones but are afraid to say. There is a secret force occupying this land—it's why I left for Quebec." The man had long, graying hair and was carrying an expensive-looking briefcase. When I asked him his name and profession, he said, "No, no, there are hidden cameras everywhere! They get it on tape and they can sue me, sue you, the new laws." As we left the café, Soral said, "Well, who knows who he was. Anyway, he's gone to Canada—I know a lot of people who are leaving."

On February 13, 2006, Ilan Halimi, a twenty-three-year-old cell-phone salesman, was found—naked, gagged, and handcuffed—near a train station south of Paris. He had burns and traces of torture on eighty per cent of his body, and died on the way to the hospital. Halimi had been kidnapped and held for three weeks in a cellar in the suburb of Bagneux. The police traced the crime to a group that became known as "the gang of Barbarians," allegedly led by Youssouf Fofana, the twenty-five-year-old son of African immigrants, and determined that Halimi had been abducted because he was Jewish. Eighteen people were arrested in France, and after a manhunt that led to the Ivory Coast, Fofana was taken into custody. Fofana denied killing Halimi, and that his actions were motivated by race, but other detainees told the police that "Jews have money," and that they believed that Halimi's parents, a working-class couple, or "the rabbi" would pay half a million dollars for Halimi's release.



Sammy Ghozlan, the head of a French group that monitors anti-Semitism, said that the words of an "alleged comedian" influenced the killers, and Julien Dray, the spokesman for the Socialist Party and a founder of S.O.S. Racisme, declared that Halimi's death was a result of "the Dieudonné effect." Dieudonné denounced Dray for throwing around murder accusations lightly. In a statement he released at the time, Dieudonné attributed the torture-abduction to the neo-liberalism that "has established the cult of profit as the central value of society" and to the "American drift in French society." On February 26, 2006, pamphlets depicting Dieudonné and Fofana above the words "Thinker. Murderer" were distributed during a March in Paris to protest Halimi's murder. While French politicians were holding vigils for Halimi, Dieudonné invited to his theatre the family of another victim of a kidnap-murder and called for an end to the "discrimination among victims" that allegedly favored Jews. A few days later, Dieudonné held a rally on the theme of "Republican equality against discrimination among victims," adding an Algerian and an Armenian to the list of those whose killings had gotten scant notice. At about this time, Dieudonné added to his show impersonations of Hitler ("You'll see, the future will present me as a moderate!") and the French Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson.

In Bagneux, the suburb where Halimi was murdered, Jean-Claude Tchicaya, a government social worker, organizes workshops and field trips to foster understanding among blacks, Arabs, and Jews. "Halimi was tortured in the town where I live, in the neighborhood where I live, in the building where my mother lives," Tchicaya told me. "I even knew personally some of the young people who were part of the murder gang. To believe that all Jews are rich is an anti-Semitic prejudice that didn't exist in the neighborhood twenty years ago." He added, "Dieudonné is cunning, insinuating. He touches parts of people's minds that are vulnerable."

In May, 2006, a group calling itself the Tribu Ka marched down the Rue des Rosiers, the main street of the Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Le Marais, chanting anti-Semitic slogans. The Tribu Ka's leader, Kémi Séba, a French-born man of Ivory Coast and Haitian parentage, reportedly issued a "warning” to France’s Jewish community: “If by any chance the French Jews brush even a single hair of Brother Fofana’s head, we will take care of the curls of your rabbi.” In July, Sarkozy, who was then the interior minister, had the Tribu Ka banned. All of this meant further embarrassment for Dieudonné, who, it was revealed, allowed Séba to use the Théâtre de la Main d’Or for meetings in which he reportedly praised Hitler’s ideas on race. Dieudonné’s office issued a statement emphasizing the gulf between Séba and himself, and pointing out that Séba’s “ethnically based organization”—the Tribu Ka excludes non-blacks from its meetings—was the opposite of the “republican project defended by Dieudonné.” (Two months ago, the Théâtre de la Main d’Or announced Séba’s stage début, a “street politic” production called “Sarkophobie.”)

In August, 2006, Dieudonné left town on an “anti-Zionist solidarity mission,” and arrived in Beirut in the wake of Israel’s war with Hezbollah. He was accompanied by his Presidential campaign manager, Marc Robert; the September 11th conspiracy theorist Thierry Meyssan; and Ahmed Moualek, the leader of the youth organization La Banlieue S’Exprime! (The Suburbs Speak!). Dieudonné met with the chief of Hezbollah’s television network, Al Manar, and was photographed shaking hands with Jesse Jackson, who looked befuddled. By his side during all these encounters was his new friend from the National Front, Alain Soral.

I saw Soral again this past May, two weeks after the French Presidential elections. Le Pen had won only ten per cent of the vote—his worst showing in years—and failed to qualify for a second round. Though the victorious Sarkozy campaign managed to win National Front supporters by promising a tough new immigration policy, N.F. insiders blamed the outcome on Soral’s “*banlieue*” strategy and the alliance with Dieudonné, who, they believed, had alienated white voters as well as moderates. “We have passed into the Republic of Show Business, a schmatte monarchy,” Soral said glumly. “There was almost nobody on the Champs-Élysées for Sarkozy’s victory, but on TV it looked like crowds. It was just like in Baghdad, with the tearing down of Saddam Hussein’s statue. It was all staged television, recycled crowds, Jews. The French people don’t care—they’re like cows watching a train go by.”

On May 10th, a memorial to the victims of France’s slave trade was dedicated in the Luxembourg Gardens. The memorial is a red-and-green metal rendering of the links of a chain, with the words “violence,” “prison,” “liberty,” “rape,” and “independence” running in relief along them. Until the late nineteen-nineties, France had not formally acknowledged its involvement in the slave trade. Yet in the eighteenth century, when sugar fuelled global power and conflict, the French colony of Saint-Domingue, run with extraordinary cruelty, was one of the world’s largest single markets for slaves.

In 2001, the National Assembly declared that the Atlantic slave trade was a “crime against humanity,” and since then the French have been “discovering” their history as a slave empire. (The government began accelerating the process after the *banlieue* riots in the fall of 2005.) The ceremony dedicating the memorial was Sarkozy’s first as President-elect, and he stood awkwardly, surrounded by France’s leading black activists and sports stars, as the sins of the nation were read out. Dieudonné clasped his hands behind his back as he walked around the monument, which resembled a truncated piece of kids’ climbing equipment. *“Pas mal, pas mal,”* he said.

He was in a jovial mood. As we walked through the park, he speculated that, with the pro-Israel, center-right Sarkozy in power, demand for his alternative voice would grow. A young man in a dark business suit approached Dieudonné and said, “Sir, I really respect you. I want to say you’re great.” Two high-school students asked him for autographs. Joggers, both white and black, waved enthusiastically as they ran by. After a while, we sat on a park bench. He talked about the evolution of his performance style, and his conviction that comedy can never be too serious. “I understand that my laughter can scare people,” he said, as two boys, one white, the other Asian, approached to ask for autographs. A group of black teen-agers wearing white T-shirts, baseball caps, and gold chains appeared. “We love you, we love you,” chanted the teen-agers, who said they were from Martinique. “You’re too cool, too funny.” We then made our way down the Boulevard Saint-Michel, to a bistro near the Panthéon. Dieudonné asked for a table in the back. He eyed the plates passing from the kitchen, asking the waiters to identify each dish. “We’ll trust you to pick us a good red to drink,” he said to one. He began to tell me about a DVD he was planning to make with the Pygmies.

He said that his family (he has four children with a white French woman with whom he has been living for fourteen years) often visited New York—“Broadway is marvellous!” His conversation veered from Broadway to Big Oil, the World Bank, and why he favored nuclear proliferation in states like North Korea and Iran: “It will bring more peace, not less—balance is always good.”

I asked about the show he was writing for the 2008 season. “It will be called ‘Love and Daisies,’ ” he said. “I can’t tell you details, but I guarantee one thing: there will be Pygmies, real live Pygmies, from the jungles of Cameroon. It’s going to be very light.” Really? “Well, maybe it’s going to get violent,” he replied with a grin. “But love is violent sometimes. We start with love and flowers, and we see where it takes us.”

Dieudonné sometimes speaks as if he were baffled that he could ever give offense—almost as if his words were uttered by someone else. His dream, he said, was to put on a big show in the Middle East—a comedy with the Jews and the Arabs. “Last summer, I met with Muslim comics in these countries,” he told me. “They are hostile to the politics of the Israeli state, of course, but I don’t think they will be hostile to Jewish humor necessarily. And I don’t know Shiite humor—but they must laugh as much in Iran as anywhere.” He went on, “Maybe the Jew would have to play the Palestinian, the Palestinian would play the American, the American would play the Iranian—it could be funny. Enriching. Fun for each side. It’s not the unknown that scares me; it’s the known that makes me scared. I will continue to clown around, whatever happens. I have nothing to lose. I am like a Pygmy in his forest who sees the big trees falling and says, ‘Let’s go, let’s go!’ The French Revolution is my tradition. It’s a mind-set of the French, that you need a revolution. I am deeply French.” ♦

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WHY WE STRIKE

BY LARRY DOYLE

> Many in showbiz don't have a clear understanding of the writers' demands or the reasoning behind these demands.
>
> —*Variety.*

OUR BELIEFS: We are artists. We may not dress all cool like artists, or get chicks like artists, and none of us are starving, quite obviously, but Hollywood screenwriters are certainly artists, perhaps even *artistes*, and we suffer just the same. Not in a showy, oh-I-live-in-a-tenement-and-turn-tricks-to-buy-paint-and-have-this-special-tuberculosis-only-artists-get kind of way. We suffer as we slave over our screenplays alone, staring into blank laptops, often blinded by pool glare. And we smoke *real* cigarettes.

We are not in this for the money. Management would have you believe that we all make $200,000 a year. That's funny. We wouldn't even *eat* something that cost $200,000, unless it was actually $200,000, drizzled with truffle oil, the way Silvio makes it. *Yum.* The only reason we require payment at all is so we can support those little people we keep telling you about—the assistants, amanuenses, baristas, Rolfers, scarf carriers, and erotic muses we need to create our art. Oh, and our babies. And various charities.

We are not cogs in some machine. While many of today's blockbusters are written by that machine, we are not cogs in it, despite having originally written all the dialogue and characters and plot that this machine endlessly recombines and maximizes. When a bitter cop with a shattered family and a monkey on his back flees a narco-terrorist's fireball while cracking that he's getting too old for this, *some writer wrote some parts of that, some time back.*

Nor are we trained chimps. The last decent show written by chimps was "Jojo's Poop Party," which was largely improvised.

OUR DEMANDS: *An end to the lying.* Just kidding. We recognize that, without lying, Management would be unable to exhale and would thus perish. However, we are asking for a manifold increase in White Lies about how we are brilliant geniuses and the like, and a corresponding decrease in Brown Lies, about what might happen in the future.

A fair share of newfangled revenue. Management is currently offering us adjusted bubkes of what they are making off Internet sell-through, streaming, ringtones, Webisodes, cellisodes, iPodisodes, celebrity-narrated colonoscosodes, or the psychotic episodes they've been beaming into your brain, brought to you by Clozaril™. All we are asking is 2.5 per cent of revenue, based on forty per cent of gross receipts, divided by zero, in bullion. We believe that this is a fair formula, yet one complicated enough for Management to continue to find ways to exercise their cheating rights.

More respect. We are demanding unbounded respect bordering on worship, but that's just our opening offer. We'll accept far, far less, or even a good-faith reduction in spittle.

Meaningful consultation. While we acknowledge Management's right to rape our material, pervert its meaning, and cravenly dilute it for commercial use, we demand to participate in this process. We would like to be on set, or contacted by iPhone if the director doesn't want us there, and simply be asked, "Is this O.K.?" We stipulate that our opinion, coming, as it does, from the creator of the material being dramatized, is meaningless, and that Management can walk away or hang up before we even answer the question, but it would be nice, for once, to be asked.

A renunciation of droit du seigneur. As it stands, studio executives, from chairman down to associate producer, have the right to deflower us on our wedding night, or any other night or time of day of their choosing. We believe that this change can be written into our contracts without affecting a similar agreement they have with the Screen Actors Guild. ♦

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MEDICAL DISPATCH

SMALL AND THIN

The controversy over the fetal origins of adult health.

BY STEPHEN S. HALL

In the early nineteen-eighties, a group of British epidemiologists at the University of Southampton compiled a grimly detailed atlas of the common causes of death in various parts of England and Wales. The atlas contained page after page of maps for everything from cirrhosis of the liver (most common in industrial areas) to automobile accidents (drivers in the countryside are the most at risk). One of the maps, charting heart disease, proved difficult to interpret. Heart disease, the leading killer in the Western world, is considered a rich person's illness: rates tend to rise as a society becomes more affluent. But, on this map, the poorer areas of England, in the north and west, were predominantly red, indicating higher than average death rates; the prosperous south and east, including London, were overwhelmingly green, indicating below-average death rates.

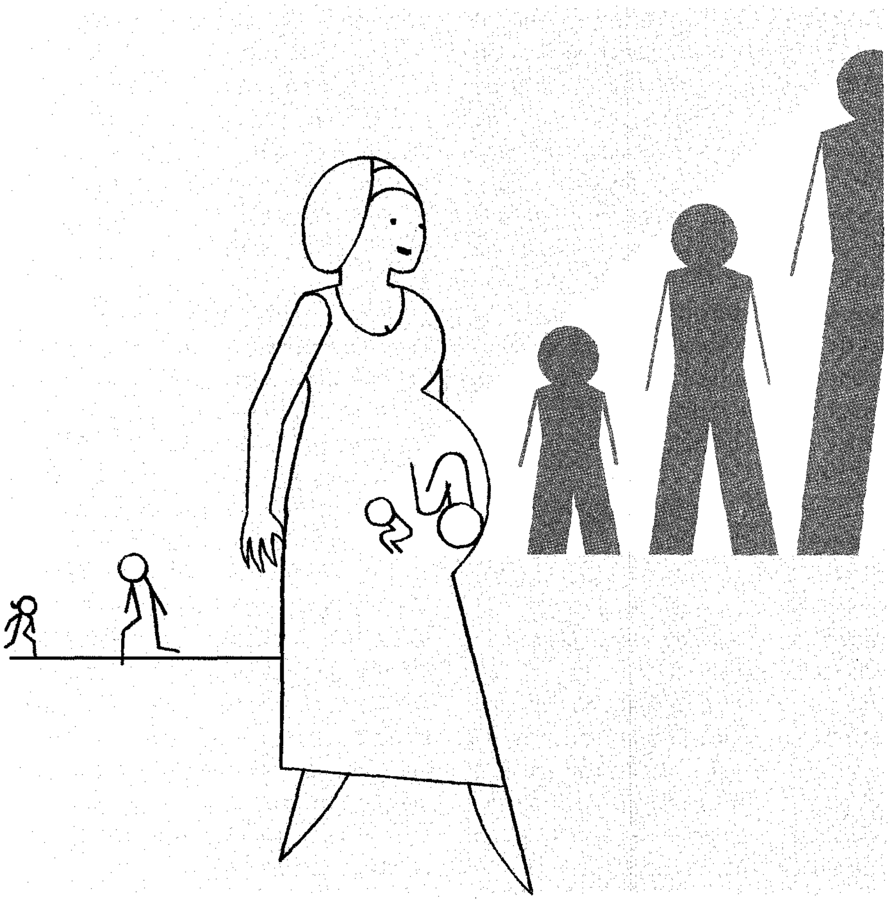
"It's a pretty dramatic map, isn't it?" David J. P. Barker, one of the authors, said recently, after pulling the book, "Atlas of Mortality from Selected Diseases in England and Wales, 1968-1978," from a shelf in the office in his home, near Southampton. In the era of genetic research, such an epidemiology had an anachronistic, almost Bartleby-like feel. But Barker had become fascinated by the puzzling pattern.

"At the time we started looking at this, there were some pretty good indications that the answer was *not* going to lie in the way that poor people lead their lives as adults," Barker said. For decades, conventional medical wisdom has attributed heart disease to factors like obesity, eating a high-fat diet, lack of exercise, and smoking. But, in contemporary Britain, "diet is relatively homogeneous," Barker said. "Although poor people eat fewer fruits and vegetables, the differences weren't that big, and so couldn't go anywhere near explaining these big differences in health. So the other logical possibility was to think, Well, maybe they're simply more vulnerable to what everybody does." Barker continued, "And if you're thinking about vulnerability, you'd better think back to childhood. And so we wondered how babies were fed in the past in these places that were showing up on the map as red."

Governments do not typically keep archives of the caloric intake of babies born decades earlier, of course, so Barker and a statistician named Clive Osmond tracked down data they thought could serve as a proxy: records of infant mortality between 1921 and 1925. To plot the incidence of adult heart disease, Barker and Osmond used every death certificate recorded between 1968 and 1978. They divided England and Wales into two hundred and twelve areas and created what they called a "map of vulnerability." And they discovered that the areas with the highest death rates from heart disease had the highest rates of infant mortality about fifty years earlier.

Barker and Osmond then focussed on the deaths that occurred within the first month after birth and so were probably due to prenatal problems. On the whole, the poorer areas had higher rates of both early and late infant mortality (as well as higher rates of heart disease) than the more affluent areas, with one glaring exception: poor, slum-ridden parts of London. There the neonatal-death rates were surprisingly low.

"London was the only large place where there was a discontinuity," Barker said. He decided that it wasn't a matter of medical care—in both city and countryside, almost all babies were then born at home, and neonatal health care was primitive at best. He noted that the older infants had died, "for all the reasons that anyone who's read Dickens's novels is all too familiar with, such as crowded and unsanitary housing. So there was an issue about why death rates in *newborn* babies were so low in London."



Low birth weight seemed to raise the likelihood of illnesses like heart disease.

LAURENT CILLUFFO

Barker is given to wearing the same rumpled clothes for days on end, and, as he once put it, has "never been anything other than the shortest boy in school." He is effortlessly sarcastic. Now sixty-nine, he has a head of white hair over dark eyebrows, a ruddy face, and a low voice that often descends to a whisper. His office bookshelves are crammed with scientific texts and with his mother's editions of Thackeray and Austen. Barker is a good storyteller, and he relished getting to "the mystery of London" because it advertised an approach to epidemiology—not just number-crunching but also social history, economics, and narrative stitchwork—that his admirers find highly imaginative and his critics find maddening.

"London renewed itself through the nineteenth century by bringing in the fittest young people—men and women, but particularly women who went into domestic service. They came from the villages," he said, people born and raised in England's prime agricultural country, to the east and south of London. "You start from very well-nourished communities, with tall churches and tall people," Barker said. But because agricultural wages were extremely low, wage riots broke out in the nineteen-twenties, and many young people migrated to London. "They brought with them all the advantages of having had a well-nourished childhood, and the women gave birth to healthy babies, who tended not to die," he said.

Those women posed the question that would shape the next twenty-five years of Barker's scientific career: Was vulnerability to heart disease rooted in adulthood, in childhood—or did it go all the way back to life in the womb? "And London said it's for sure about life in the womb, or newborn babies at most," Barker told me. That led him to the next question: Was the trajectory toward disease perhaps set by how healthy the mother had been even before her childbearing years?

In 1986, when Barker's basic claim that heart disease was "related to nutrition during prenatal and early postnatal life"—now known as the "Barker hypothesis"—was first published, in *The Lancet*, it was regarded as heretical. Barker took this as a personal rebuke. In his telling, the critics expected him to "just go away." Instead, he cast a wider net for more historical data. He was keen to get his hands on one particular statistic: birth weight.

Now, when Barker lectures, he shows slides of the red-and-green heart-disease map and an arresting 1912 photograph of barefoot street urchins from London's East End. "You live in two worlds," he said at a recent talk at Princeton, "the world of your mother and the world into which you are born." He made disparaging asides about the "dismal failure" of genetic research to explain chronic diseases. And, as he does often these days, he ended with a pledge to "fix" the problem. For Barker, this includes injunctions about the diets of young girls and the risks of low birth weight and, more surprising, the unsettling suggestion that underweight toddlers might be better off not growing too fast—that there might be advantages in the small remaining, relatively speaking, small.

Like many people of his generation, David Barker had a childhood that was shaped by the Second World War. He was born in London in 1938. His father, a mechanical engineer, joined the military when the war began; his mother, a violinist, took him to live in a small village called Much Hadham, in Hertfordshire, north of London, as part of the evacuation of children from London during the blitz. His younger sister was born there in 1943.

After attending the British public school Oundle, Barker went on to medical school at Guy's Hospital, in London, and trained as an internist before beginning graduate studies in epidemiology at the University of Birmingham. In 1972, he accepted an offer to join a new medical school that was being built in Southampton, a gritty port city heavily bombed by the Germans during the Second World War. It was far from Oxford and Cambridge, the twin jewels of British academic science, and Barker simultaneously cultivated and resented his outsider status. ("We've done very well being big fish in a small pond," he told me one day.)

In 1980, on the day after Easter, Barker's wife, Angela, died after a long battle with mental illness, and Barker found himself, at age forty-two, the single parent of five children, ranging in age from six to eighteen. His epidemiological work all but stopped. Then, in 1983, Barker married Jan Tarplett, who was divorced and had three children of her own. In addition to taking care of eight children, Jan embroidered art works to illustrate the covers of his books; she sewed wedding dresses for several women in his lab group; and, in 1986, she found Manor Farm, a fourteen-acre homestead in East Dean, between Southampton and Salisbury. "My own Barker hypothesis," Osmond told me, "is that without Jan, David would have been sunk."

Barker, who believes that much of modern biology has become estranged from the natural world, takes frequent walks along the River Dun, a chalk stream that runs through Manor Farm. Sometimes the river has the quality of a moat. There is a sense of isolation there, one that may stem, at least in part, from the strong antipathy Barker's work initially provoked. The intensity of the reactions made me wonder if people were responding to the theory or to the scientist. Barker has an ability to infuriate, and a tendency to make sweeping statements. (At one point, as he was explaining again that the issue is not just what women eat during pregnancy but, rather, their lifetime dietary habits, Barker told me, "A woman is merely the arena for miracles over which she has no control.") A scientist who has worked on the fetal-origins hypothesis told me that Barker "is very aggressive in talking about it, and I think he has made himself enemies that have been unhelpful. That's been his style. I'm not sure it's been necessary or optimal."

One of the earliest reservations about the Barker hypothesis was that, although the 1986 *Lancet* paper had unearthed an unexpected connection, it provided no evidence that whatever caused infant mortality also caused surviving children born in the same areas to become sick later in life. By definition, the babies who died were not the ones suffering from the diseases of middle age. What Barker needed was some way to tie an individual's prenatal development with his health as an adult. Birth weight, he thought, would be the best proxy—what he called "a shorthand" for fetal growth.

Low birth weight, typically defined as less than 5.5 pounds (2.5 kilograms), can relate to any number of adverse gestational events, from smoking to malnutrition. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 8.2 per cent of the roughly four million children born in the United States each year are low-birth-weight babies; the statistics are higher for black women. Worldwide, the percentage is closer to 15.5. Premature infants account for about two-thirds of low-birth-weight babies in the United States, while the vast majority of such cases in the developing world—more than ninety per cent—are due to nutritional deprivation and poor maternal health during gestation. (Barker's initial research did not involve premature babies, since only the hardiest from the first half of the twentieth century survived.)

"And your wife called to remind you not to have sex with anyone on your way home."

In his search for old records of birth weights, Barker had written, by his own estimate, more than a thousand letters to local health officials. In the summer of 1987, he received a reply from Hertfordshire: a collection of old handwritten ledgers had been shipped to the county archives. Barker drove up to Hertford himself to visit the county archivist.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in part to improve the physical vigor of young men eligible for military service, Britain began to keep records of infant health. By local law, doctors and midwives had to report births, and "health visitors" monitored feeding and growth over the first year. In Hertfordshire, the Chief Health Visitor and Lady Inspector of Midwives was Ethel Margaret Burnside, who logged thousands of miles on her bicycle each year on visits to pregnant women and new mothers. Burnside and her platoon of nurse assistants kept detailed records of thousands of children born in six Hertfordshire villages between 1911 and 1945. One of those villages happened to be Much Hadham, and one of those children was Barker's sister.

"The guy was sitting there with these books on his desk, saying, 'I can see your point, but you can't have these records. We've put them under a fifty-year hold because of the comments that were written by the midwives and health visitors about some of the mothers,' " Barker said. "And it was the fact that on his desk were the records from Much Hadham, where I had lived, that unlocked them for us. I would not have gotten those records unless I had been able to align myself up as a local person." Hertfordshire officials eventually agreed to transfer the birth records to the University of Southampton.

It took two years for Barker and his colleagues to find the adults whose birth records they now possessed. They initially tracked down 5,654 men who were born between 1911 and 1930 (men were easier to trace than women because their last names didn't change when they got married), and then correlated mortality and health data with birth weight and infant growth. Men who had weighed 5.5 pounds or less at birth, and especially those who remained small at age one, had the highest rates of death from coronary heart disease. "I mean, we weren't in any doubt that we were right," Barker said. "It was just very, very clear."

Others were not so sure; *The Lancet* rejected the paper. "It just got trashed," Barker said. "And so I rang up the editor. I happened to know him, because I'd been a medical student with him. I said, 'You are making a big mistake here.' He had another look, and published it."

When the paper appeared, in the September 9, 1989, issue of *The Lancet*, a lot of people didn't know what to make of it. Many were unconvinced that the Southampton epidemiologists had controlled for things like socioeconomic background; Barker told me that one "not unreasonable concern" was that people born small into poor homes and impoverished environments would adopt less healthy adult life styles. More broadly, many doctors disliked the idea of fetal origins, in part because it undermined a decades-long public-health message that linked heart disease to adult behavioral factors. The late Sir Richard Doll, Britain's leading epidemiologist, told Barker that he was "very disappointed," and Barker heard that as an understated but unmistakable form of academic censure.

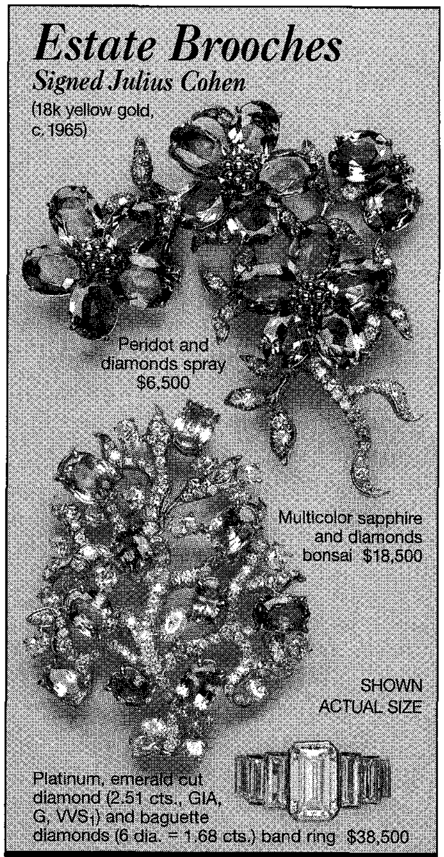
While many heart-disease experts had responded to the Barker hypothesis with hostility—"People were starting to walk out on meetings when I spoke," Barker said—another group, biologists who studied prenatal development, couldn't hear enough. "I didn't know what it meant," said Kent Thornburg, a physiologist at the Oregon Health & Science University, who encountered Barker for the first time at a conference in 1989. "But I knew it was incredibly important."

In rapid succession, new epidemiological studies confirmed and extended the observations of the *Lancet* paper. When epidemiologists found birth records in India, in South Carolina, in China, and in Sweden, the same basic pattern emerged: slow growth in the womb, as suggested by low birth weight, seemed to increase the risk of adult illnesses like coronary heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and stroke.

Even as the body of evidence grew, doubts persisted. In 1995, the *British Medical Journal* published an editorial implying that the Barker hypothesis was "broad and fuzzy" and had yet to be "subjected to an ordeal" of rigorous scientific attack. As recently as 2002, an article in *The Lancet* argued that the link between birth weight and blood pressure was overstated and minimal. But more recent epidemiological findings have favored Barker. "The idea that this effect is a statistical artifact or not real is nonsense," said David Leon, an editor at the *International Journal of Epidemiology*. He characterized some of the critiques as "mischievous."

Barker hasn't always made it easy for his supporters. His colleagues say that he would berate critics who didn't "get it." He would refuse to engage in scientific debates. He seemed to be daring his detractors to prove him wrong. But that, too, had its advantages. As Johan Eriksson, one of Barker's collaborators, put it, "The best thing to happen to this field is people trying to disprove the Barker hypothesis."

One of the most significant events in the life history of a scientific idea occurs when its detractors become adherents. A Danish researcher, Allan Vaag, told me that he "really did not believe in this theory" until 1997; that was the year he discovered, in a study of identical twins, that diagnoses of type 2 diabetes were more common for the twin who had a lower birth weight. Janet Rich-Edwards, a Harvard Medical School epidemiologist with the Nurses' Health Study, which has tracked about a hundred thousand women since 1976, admitted that she "set out to prove that Barker was totally wrong." But, in 1997, Rich-Edwards and her colleagues reported "strong evidence" of a connection between low birth weight and a heightened risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. In 2000, Rich-Edwards and her Harvard colleague Matthew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Gillman published a paper titled "The Fetal Origins of Adult Disease: From Sceptic to Convert."

On a windswept, rainy day in February, 1995, Johan Eriksson, a young Finnish doctor, arrived at Manor Farm for a visit. In his restless search for early birth records, Barker had begun to suspect that there was a gap in the story. All along, there had been hints from the epidemiology that how much and how fast a low-birth-weight child grew might also matter a great deal. That first evening, after dinner, Barker remembers telling Eriksson, "The thing we really, really need, beyond everything else, is some records of growth in children whose size at birth had been measured."

Eriksson replied, "I have them."

In the early nineties, intrigued by the Barker hypothesis, Eriksson and his colleague Tom Forsén had launched a search for Finnish birth records. "I was certain we would find them somewhere," Forsén told me. "I just didn't know how many." They found exquisitely detailed birth records of fifty-three thousand babies born at Helsinki University Central Hospital between 1924 and 1944, which included not only birth weight but size of the placenta and measures of the mother's body composition. They also found thousands of school growth cards and child-welfare-clinic cards. The Finnish researchers then set out to track down the adults these children became.

In 1971, Finland began to issue a personal identity number to every citizen; this number was used to register hospital admissions, prescriptions, socioeconomic data, and, eventually, cause of death. By painstakingly collating these records, the researchers managed to assemble comprehensive pictures of the infancy, growth, and health of thousands of Finns.

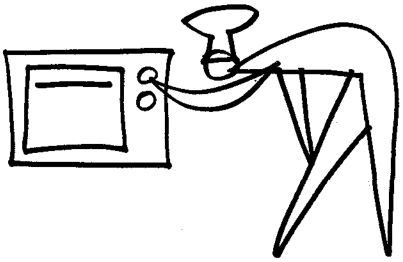
In 1997, the first paper based on the "Helsinki cohort," as it came to be known, appeared in the *British Medical Journal*. The study showed that thinness at birth seemed to be linked to the child's vulnerability to later disease and that small size at age one was associated with adult mortality from heart disease. The mother's body composition also played a role. Women who were small because their own growth had been affected by poor childhood nutrition often produced low-birth-weight babies. Short women who were overweight, Barker said, were the "most dangerous scenario" for heart disease in their offspring, while tall women could become overweight without dramatically affecting the disease prospects of their children. Fifty-four papers have been published to date on the Helsinki cohort, with another twenty-three in preparation, and they have been consistent in their findings. Osmond said, "Our best estimate is that every one kilogram increase [in birth weight] reduces heart disease by about seventeen per cent. The effect with diabetes seems a bit stronger."

The Helsinki data, as summarized in a 2005 paper in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, suggested that the biggest threat to adult health, however, was rapid gain in body mass index (a standard, though imperfect, measure of body fat) in a child who had a low weight at birth and had been small and thin during the first two years of life.

"What the Finland paper shows is that the children who are going to bankrupt the American health system are not fat children," Barker said. "They are thin children who are putting on weight at age two, three, four, five, six, and so on. That's a difficult thing to say. These are invisible children."

On a sunny spring afternoon at the University of Southampton, a biologist named Tom Fleming offered Barker and me a cup of tea, and then gave us a harrowing tour of some recent experiments with animals. Fleming was among the earliest to test the Barker hypothesis experimentally by asking what could biologically explain the correlation between birth weight and later disease.

In one study, Fleming's group fed pregnant rats a low-protein diet for the first four days after fertilization. The researchers then gave the rats normal diets for the remainder of gestation. Yet that four-day period exerted profound and irreversible long-term effects. The embryos had fewer stem cells than those of pregnant rats fed a normal diet and, after birth, had differences in organ size, weight, growth, and metabolic function, including blood pressure.



"The way I understand things now," Fleming said, as Barker listened intently, "is that the embryo is having a kind of dialogue with its mother about nutrient availability. And that dialogue will result in appropriate compensatory mechanisms if, for example, nutrition is poor."

Even at this very early point—at an analogous stage, most women would not even know they were pregnant—Fleming believes that the embryo can detect reduced levels of insulin and essential amino acids, as well as elevated levels of glucose, in the blood of its mother. If those nutrient levels are limited or unbalanced, the embryo must adjust—either by extracting more nutrition from the mother or by slowing down its own growth. "The most critical thing for the embryo is that it engages in a growth trajectory that is appropriate for its nutrient availability," Fleming said.

Back in 1992, Barker and C. Nicholas Hales, a biochemist at Cambridge, attributed the development of type 2 diabetes disease in adults to what they called the "thrifty phenotype." The idea was that the fetus set its metabolic thermostat during critical periods of gestation. If the setting was "thrifty," because of less than optimal fetal nutrition, the individual would be metabolically and physiologically ill suited to adapt to the nutritional prosperity of postnatal life in most developed countries. A person whose metabolism had been programmed to deal with its mother's poor diet, for example, would be overwhelmed by a plentiful childhood diet, and put on fat rather than acquire muscle mass.

Barker calls the kidneys, which regulate blood pressure, "a pretty piece of biology." During a brief developmental window, between the thirtieth and thirty-sixth week of gestation, the fetus calibrates the number of blood-cleansing kidney units, or nephrons, it needs to make. Full-term low-birth-weight babies possess as much as thirty to forty per cent fewer nephrons than higher-birth-weight babies. In the nineteen-nineties, Barry M. Brenner, a nephrologist at Harvard Medical School, proposed that these babies would be at greater risk for high blood pressure as adults—a prediction that subsequent research has borne out. If a small and thin baby puts on weight quickly after infancy, the likelihood of kidney dysfunction in adulthood increases, too. "If you're small and you grow rapidly, you're overwhelming your reserve capacity," Brenner said. "You're stressing the system."

There is keen medical debate, and conflicting scientific data, about the optimal growth of a child between birth and age two. When I asked Barker about it, he made sure to say that no child is doomed by low birth weight; rather, knowledge of the risks should allow doctors to identify heightened vulnerability in certain children, for whom preventive measures can make a great deal of difference. But, he said, "The two messages for parents are: the nutrition and growth of your baby in the first two years after it's born is important, and, broadly, the more it grows, the better. Growth is good. But *after* two, the rules change, and it's better if babies stay in their tracks"—for a small child to stay small—"rather than starting to go up through the centiles."

Since 2003, Barker has held a position at the Oregon Health & Science University, in Portland, and he and his wife have established a foundation dedicated to optimizing the growth of infants and children. In February, O.H.S.U. began to enroll young women in a pilot project to monitor their diet, health, and, eventually, pregnancies. "We are going to alter the nutritionally poor environment of people in Oregon," Barker said in a recent talk. "We don't know how to do it, but we're going to try."

Pronouncements like that carry vexing implications. "In many of the closed-door meetings, with five or six or ten scientists sitting around the table, this becomes a very hot debate," Thornburg said. Matthew Gillman, of Harvard, believes it is not only nutrition but the entire maternal milieu—diet, stress, hormones—that affects intrauterine growth, and said that there is no reason to change current recommendations to pregnant mothers, which are to avoid smoking, increase the consumption of fish, and eat a balanced diet. Of course, those recommendations can be confusing enough—eat fish, but not too much of fish that might be high in mercury. Barker's work expands that bubble of anxiety.

The Barker hypothesis has, gradually, acquired its own air of orthodoxy, When I used the word "controversial" to describe it in a recent conversation with Richard Schultz, who studies early development at the University of Pennsylvania, he quickly took exception. "A few years ago, it was considered controversial," Schultz said. "But it's my sense that it's no longer controversial, and people have moved on. The discussion now is about what are the underlying cellular and molecular mechanisms."

Given Barker's frequent caustic references to "modern-day hereditarians," perhaps the most ironic turn in the story of the Barker hypothesis is its convergence with a new field of biology known as epigenetics, which refers to the way environmental factors can produce permanent changes in the activity of genes. Researchers have recently found that subtle nutritional changes in the diets of rats and mice can turn off certain genes in the developing fetus, with lifelong effects on metabolism and growth.

Barker is, typically, impatient with principally genetic explanations. "Genes are not Stalinist dictators," he said. "They live in a democracy, and what they do is conditioned by what else is going on around them. If geneticists find molecular mechanisms for this, bully for them! It's just not where I live," he said. "I can't wait twenty years for the geneticists to figure this out before we start improving the nutrition of human babies. You know? One-quarter of all babies born in Southampton are recognizably thin. This will lead to shorter lives as a group. We need to fix it!"

Later, when we spoke in his office, he said, "How much do we need to know about how it works at the cellular and molecular level to fix it? Maybe we don't need to know anything very much." He added, "You almost can't say that—it's such a deeply held belief that you have to really understand something before you fix it. But I don't believe that's how it will work out." ♦

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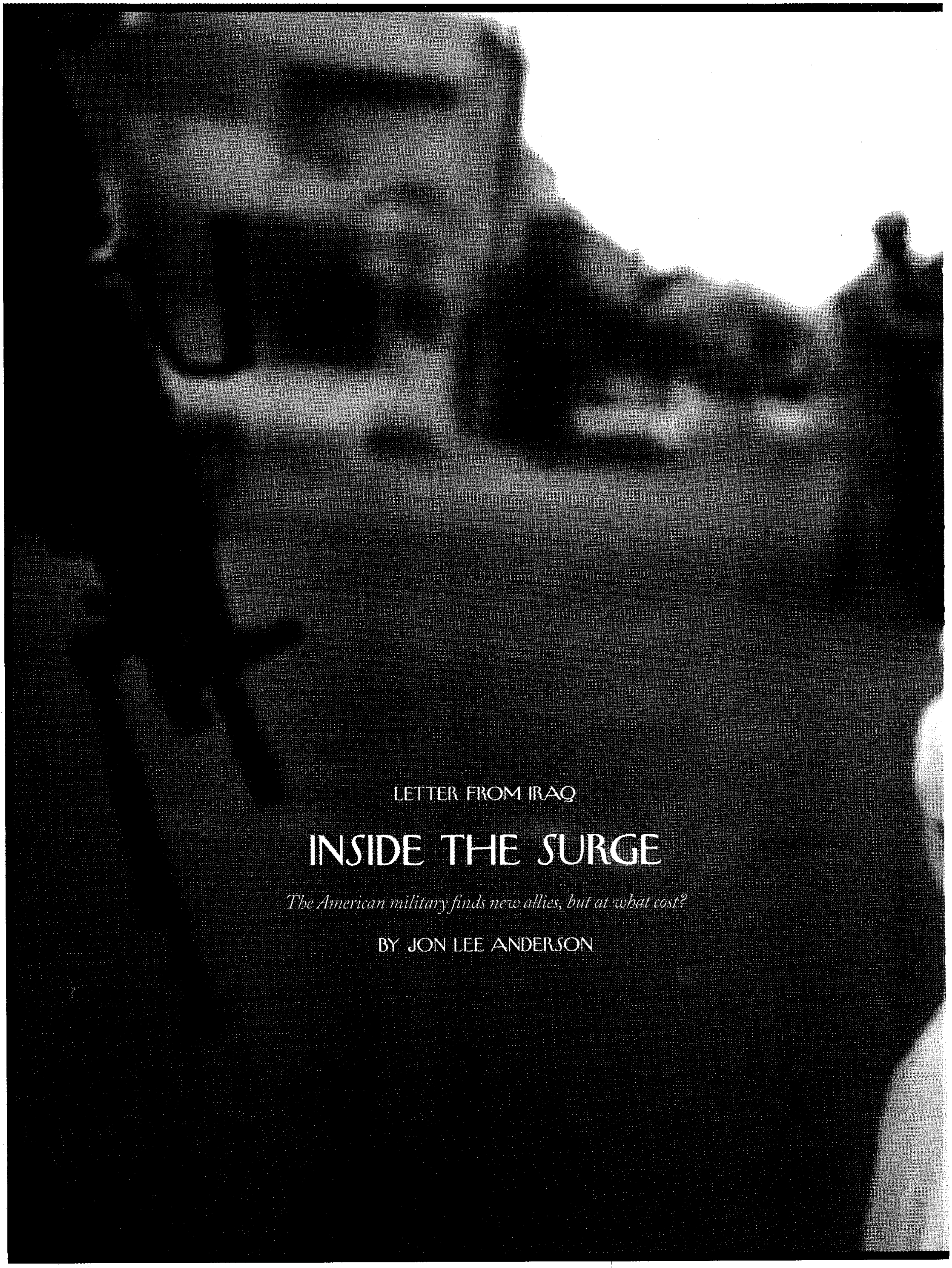


LETTER FROM IRAQ

INSIDE THE SURGE

The American military finds new allies, but at what cost?

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

A man suspected of Mahdi Army activity is detained during a recent raid in Baghdad. General David Petraeus has singled out Ghazaliya,

a mostly Sunni district in the western part of the city, as an area where the military has made progress. Photographs by Johan Spanner.

Joint Security Station Thrasher, in the western Baghdad suburb of Ghazaliya, is housed in a Saddam-era mansion with twenty-foot columns and a fountain, now dry, that looks like a layer cake of concrete and limestone. The mansion and two adjacent houses have been surrounded by blast walls. J.S.S. Thrasher was set up last March, and is part of the surge in troops engineered by General David Petraeus, the American commander in Iraq. Moving units out of large bases and into Joint Security Stations—small outposts in Baghdad's most dangerous districts—has been crucial to Petraeus's counterinsurgency strategy, and Thrasher is now home to a hundred American soldiers and a few hundred Iraqis. This fall, on the roof of the mansion, amid sandbags, communications gear, and exercise equipment protected by a sniper awning, Captain Jon Brooks, Thrasher's commander, pointed out some of the local landmarks. "This site was selected because it was the main body drop in Ghazaliya," he said, indicating a grassy area nearby. "There were up to eleven bodies a week. Most were brutally mutilated."

The Mother of All Battles Mosque, with its unmistakable phalanx of minarets shaped like Scud missiles, is nearby. Saddam Hussein hid in Ghazaliya during the American bombing in the first Gulf War, and built the mosque to show his gratitude to the neighborhood. ("Ghazaliya used to have—still does—a lot of retired Saddam military people," Brooks said.) In April, 2004, wounded gunmen taking part in the battle for Falluja took refuge in the mosque. Ghazaliya borders the eastern edge of Anbar province, the center of the Sunni insurgency, and it became a strategic gateway to Baghdad for insurgents and foreign jihadis. On a previous visit to Ghazaliya, in December, 2003, I had met insurgents at a safe house in the neighborhood. They told me that they were intent on killing Americans. Since those days, with few exceptions, Ghazaliya had been a no-go area for Westerners, including journalists, who ran the risk of being kidnapped and killed. American patrols in Ghazaliya were regularly ambushed.

Captain Brooks is twenty-eight, of medium height and a stocky build, with close-cropped brown hair. From the roof, he pointed to where Sergeant Robert Thrasher, for whom the J.S.S. was named, had been killed by a sniper, last February. At the time, the company was working out of Camp Victory, the American base encompassing a large swath of Baghdad, including the airport. Thrasher was twenty-three; he had joined the Army out of high school.

Despite the insurgency's influence, Ghazaliya remained, at first, what it had been for decades—a middle-class Baghdad neighborhood in which sectarian tensions were more or less held in check. The vast majority of the estimated hundred thousand residents were Sunni, but, Brooks said, "there were a lot of professionals, college-educated Sunnis, and Shias, too, and mosques for both." The neighborhood changed after February, 2006, when Sunni militants bombed the ninth-century Askariya shrine, in Samarra, one of the Shiites' holiest sites, and sectarian violence flared up across Iraq. Shiite militias, foremost among them the Mahdi Army, pushed deeper into Ghazaliya from Shulla, a poor, sprawling Shiite neighborhood just to the north. The Sunnis responded by turning to hard-line insurgents and to the foreign jihadis of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, whom the U.S. Army called Al Qaeda in Iraq.

"You had Sunni extremists in the area before Samarra. After Samarra, though, Al Qaeda in Iraq came on strong," Captain Brooks said. "They had death squads. They systematically selected people because of the locations of their houses, or their relationships. They brutally tortured them, killed them, and dumped their bodies." Shia families, and many Sunnis—those who had the financial means—fled the neighborhood. By the beginning of this year, southern Ghazaliya was under the de-facto control of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, while the northern part of the neighborhood was besieged by Shiite militiamen. "Twenty dollars and a phone card could get you an I.E.D. placed," Captain Brooks said, referring to the improvised explosive devices that have caused the majority of American military deaths in Iraq. "The people realized they had let something in that they couldn't control."

President Bush, after securing Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's resignation, in November, gave his new war team—Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and General Petraeus—an opportunity to change the strategy in Iraq, and in February the surge began. The plan called for thirty thousand extra troops; estimates of the actual number run as high as fifty thousand. Thirty-four Joint Security Stations were opened in Baghdad, three of them in Ghazaliya: the first, J.S.S. Casino, in northern Ghazaliya; next, in the southwest, J.S.S. Thrasher; and, last May, J.S.S. Maverick, in the southeast.

Brooks pointed to a large house with broken windows across from the base. His men called it the Cannister-Round House, because when they were first moving in snipers had fired on them from inside, and they responded by lobbing tank shells into the house. "We don't get shot at anymore," he said. Brooks's men began the manpower-intensive work of conducting systematic patrols by day and aggressive raids at night; William Bushnell, a sergeant in Brooks's company, was killed on one of those patrols in April. Previously, Brooks's men had headed back to the heavily fortified Camp Victory after roving through Ghazaliya. With the surge, the Americans became a permanent presence in the neighborhood. After they moved in, the U.S. Army erected twenty miles of concrete walls in Ghazaliya, both to separate Shiite and Sunni residents from each other and to establish secure perimeters. Brooks said that his unit's success had been made possible by his colleagues at J.S.S. Casino, who kept Shiite militiamen from Shulla out of the neighborhood.

By midsummer, Ghazaliya's violence had abated significantly. This fall, when I stood on the roof of J.S.S. Thrasher at night, I occasionally saw explosions in the distance, fireballs flaring up in the sky. One night, a large blast shook the building, followed by automatic-weapons fire that momentarily illuminated the streets. But most of the explosions were so far away from Ghazaliya that they could not even be heard. The number of bodies found in the neighborhood had fallen steeply, "to practically zero, to pre-Samarra levels," Brooks said. His company had not lost any more men. When Petraeus spoke before Congress in September, he cited Ghazaliya as an example of the progress the military was making in Iraq.

The new strategy is also meant to prepare the ground for Iraqi security forces to replace the Americans, and all the Joint Security Stations, as the name suggests, involve Americans and Iraqis. But the Iraqis do not all belong to the official, government forces. With American assistance, several hundred armed Sunni volunteers called the Ghazaliya Guardians were gradually assuming police duties. Such U.S.-approved Sunni forces had begun to sprout up everywhere. Many of them, to the dismay of some Shiites, included former insurgents. An official with one of the major Shiite political parties told me, "Some of these armed groups were, until yesterday, hostile forces that attacked the Iraqi government, Coalition forces, and anyone who was involved in the government. They were considered terrorists. What happened?"

It was a question I heard often in Iraq. Colonel J. B. Burton is a good-natured bull of a man who commands the First Infantry's Dagger Brigade, covering most of northwest Baghdad, with fourteen J.S.S.s, including the three in Ghazaliya. "We began by asking ourselves the question: What is facilitating the entry of Al Qaeda into an area populated by moderate secular Arabs?" Colonel Burton said. The answer, he said, was fear of Shiite militias. "I think we're in a time of increasing opportunity to bring in people who want to be part of the solution. It's done by talking to people. Hell, it's no different than Tullahoma, Tennessee, where I'm from. It's sitting on the back porch, drinking tea, listening to the crickets, and talking." Colonel Burton went on, "You're talking with people who've pulled a trigger against American forces? Hell, yeah! Because we're fighting a common enemy—Al Qaeda."

His brigade's mission, Burton said, was "to defeat Al Qaeda and effect the transition to Iraqi authorities, and that's full-spectrum operations, which means everything from fighting terrorism to fixing sewage lines." Whether those goals could be accomplished ultimately hinged on political progress toward national reconciliation among Iraqis, Burton said. "We're in a window that's very narrow, and we have some important decisions to make. Which way Iraq goes will depend on what we do."

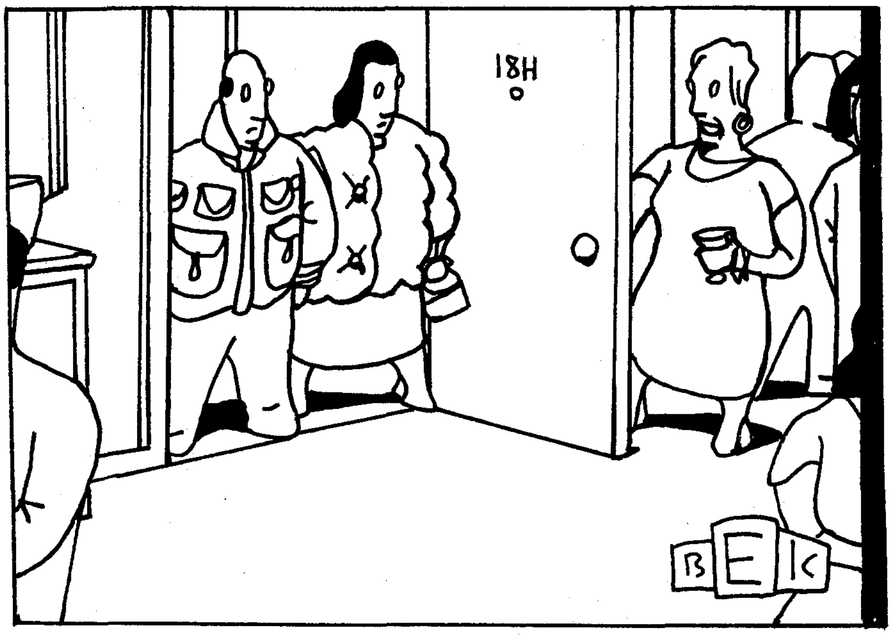
At Thrasher, Captain Brooks told me, "The new buzzword is 'sustainability.' We've learned from our experiences—for sustainable development here we need security. If they can have a local security force that can do the job, then that allows us to return home."

Ghazaliya is not the only area of Iraq in which the landscape has changed. On my previous visit to the country, ten months before, the violence seemed uncontrollable, with mass abductions and killings taking place in broad daylight. Most of the Iraqis I knew spoke bitterly about how the Americans and Iraq's political leaders were safely ensconced in the Green Zone, while mayhem raged around them. According to the Pentagon, in February the war took the lives of nearly two thousand Iraqi civilians; by October, that number had dropped to under a thousand. As with all body-count statistics in Iraq, these figures are disputed, but no one denies that the violence has waned considerably. The deaths of American soldiers have also fallen sharply, from a high of a hundred and twenty-six last May, as the surge intensified, to thirty-eight last month. For the moment, at least, it looked as if the surge might be working.

In a sense, the surge was belated emergency triage. Some of Baghdad's most dangerous Sunni neighborhoods, like Ghazaliya and Amiriya, have been tackled, but much of Diyala province, stretching from Baghdad northeast to the Iranian border, and Kirkuk, which has become a flashpoint because of Kurdish claims to the city and its oil resources, remain horrific battlegrounds. On October 29th, the same day that the decapitated bodies of twenty men were found outside Baquba, in Diyala, a suicide bomber on a bicycle killed twenty-nine policemen in the city.

And there has yet to be any significant U.S. troop presence in Baghdad's Shiite slums, such as Sadr City and Shulla, which are controlled by Shiite militiamen. Many of them claim to be members of the Mahdi Army, led by Moqtada al-Sadr, whose political brinkmanship and tactical use of violence have been an enduring source of bewilderment to the Pentagon's war planners. Indeed, analysts credit much of the recent drop in Iraqi civilian deaths not to the surge but to Sadr's decision, in August, to order the Mahdi Army, which is believed to have been responsible for much of the Shiite-on-Sunni sectarian killing in and around Baghdad, to "freeze" its activities for six months. Sadr's apparent aim was to ward off an escalation of a two-day gun battle between the Mahdi and another Shiite militia, and to reassert his control over his men.

The surge also coincided with the so-called Sunni Awakening, the decision by some Anbar tribesmen to ally themselves with the Americans and to fight



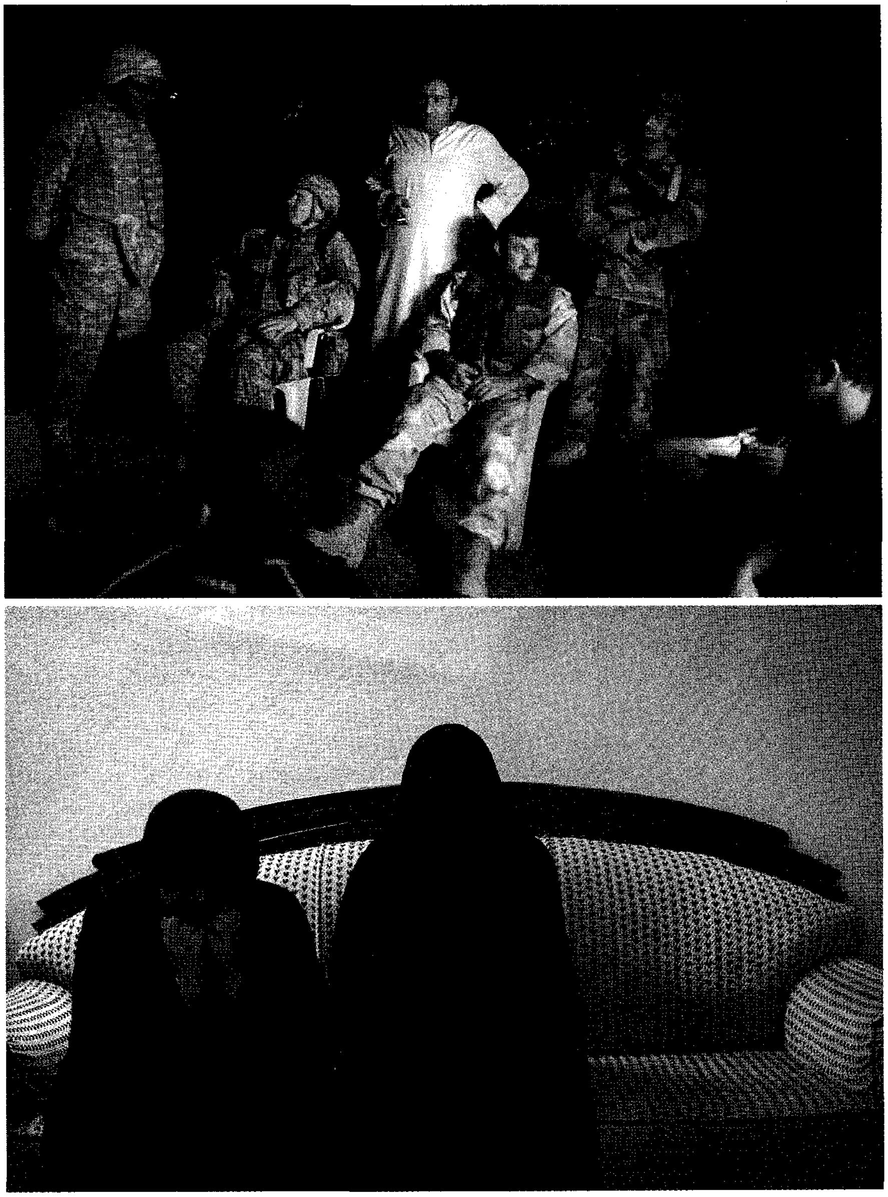
"Come on in—just throw your coats in the garbage."

against Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia—a shift that was not foreseen in Petraeus’s plan. Sunnis in other areas have since joined them, though many have not; Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia is still active, and foreign jihadis remain in the country. On September 13th, Abu Risha, the Sunni tribal leader regarded as the catalyst of the alliance, whom President Bush had met in Anbar ten days before, was assassinated. Abu Risha was an influential and charismatic figure, and although his brother stepped in to take his place, most of the Iraqis I spoke to viewed his death as a serious loss and wondered how long his brother would survive. Still, there was hope that Al Qaeda might eventually be neutralized, thus removing at least one vicious aspect of the multifaceted war.

Some combination of the surge, the Sunni Awakening, and Sadr’s freeze has helped to stabilize troubled areas of the capital and Anbar; it is unclear whether the gains can be expanded upon—or even sustained—with fewer troops, but further increases alone will not win the war. And no more troop additions are planned; instead, President Bush has promised to withdraw, by next July, almost as many troops as were brought in for the surge. Iraq’s future, for the moment, is in limbo. The best one can say, perhaps, is that the U.S. has bought or borrowed a little space to work with. But there have been costs, some more obvious than others.

A few days before General Petraeus testified before Congress, I met with Sheikh Zaidan al-Awad, a prominent Sunni tribal leader from Anbar. The last time I had seen him, in 2004, he was full of hostile bluster about the U.S., and made no secret of his identification with the “resistance,” as he described the hard-line Sunni insurgents. Sheikh Zaidan was a fugitive, suspected by the Americans of being a sponsor of the insurgency, and he was living in voluntary exile in Jordan. But when we spoke this fall, in an apartment in Amman, Zaidan told me that he had recently met for informal talks with American military and intelligence officials, because he approved of what they were now doing—allowing Sunni tribesmen to police themselves.

I asked Zaidan what sort of deal had led to the Sunni Awakening. “It’s not a *deal*,” he said, bristling. “People have come to realize that our fate is tied to the Americans’, and theirs to ours. If they are successful in Iraq, it will depend on Anbar. We always said this. Time was lost. America was lost, but now it’s woken up; it now holds a thread in its hand. For the first time, they’re doing something right.”



Lieutenant Colonel Ahsin al-Khazragee, of the Iraqi National Police, seated at right, with Major Robert O’Brien, also seated. Below: Um Jafaar, left, with her son’s widow.

Zaidan said that Anbar’s Sunni tribes no longer had any need to exact blood vengeance on U.S. forces. “We’ve already taken our revenge,” he said. “We’re the ones who’ve made them crawl on their stomachs, and now we’re the ones to pick them up.” He added, “Once Anbar is settled, we must take control of Baghdad, and we will.” There would have to be a lot more fighting before the capital was taken back from the Shiites, he said. “The Anbaris will take charge of the purge. What the whole world failed to do in Anbar, we have done overnight. Baghdad will be a lot easier.”

Many of the players in Iraq seemed, like Zaidan, to be positioning themselves for the next battle. While the Shiites issued warnings about the Sunnis’ intentions, nearly all the talk among the Americans was of the Mahdi Army and its reputed sponsor, Iran, which Petraeus accused of waging a “proxy war” in Iraq; there were dismissive references to Al Qaeda as a spent force.

Colonel Burton said, “Al Qaeda is relatively easy to fight. You just fight them, deny them access." The Mahdi Army, he said, "was harder." By all accounts, the Mahdi Army and other Shiite militias had penetrated the Iraqi security forces, and Sadr's political party was an on-again, off-again partner in Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Shiite-dominated coalition government. "We began investigating the Iraqi security forces and began to target them, their leaders, and members of the Iraqi government," Burton said. (One notorious case of official involvement in sectarian killings concerns the former deputy health minister and the ministry's security chief. In February, the men, who are Shiites and loyalists of Moqtada al-Sadr, were arrested on charges of organizing the murders of hundreds of Sunnis in Baghdad's hospitals—including patients, their relatives, and medical staff.)

Referring to the Mahdi Army by the acronym of its Arabic name, Jaish al-Mahdi, Colonel Burton said, "I talk to some of these JAM guys, you know. I have e-mail contact with some of them. Recently, a JAM sheikh in Khadamiya told me that if I released three of his guys there'd be no more attacks on U.S. forces there." He raised his eyebrows.

The Shiite authorities' control over many government services meant that there was a great deal of institutional discrimination against Sunni communities. When I was there, for example, Ghazaliya residents complained of receiving half as much electricity a day as a neighboring Shiite area. The Americans were doing a lot of politicking to alleviate the situation, but it hadn't been easy. "On the Shia side, there's lots of money moving around, and essential services are doing really well," Burton said. "But on the Sunni side—not so well."

The new strategy, like most of the previous strategies employed in Iraq, had the drawback of having been imposed by the Americans. Many of the Shiite politicians in Iraq's government were angry about the U.S. decision to wall off Baghdad neighborhoods and to recruit and arm Sunni volunteer organizations without consulting them. There were fears that the U.S. was simply arming a new set of militias—undermining the authority of the fragile coalition government. This may have been part of the goal. Iraq, with a hundred and seventy thousand U.S. troops on its soil, is not a sovereign country, and the U.S. uses its military power to shape the Iraqi political scene. By strengthening the hand of the Sunnis, the U.S. effectively forced the Maliki government to incorporate more Sunnis into the security forces—a step toward national reconciliation.

Shiite political parties and militias are so interwoven that a Shiite equivalent of the Sunni Awakening seems unlikely—it would probably require a split within the Shiite community, a civil war within a civil war. Iran would also be a major factor. Given Sadr's alleged close links to Iranian hard-liners, and the growing hostility between Iran and the United States, his future moves are virtually impossible to predict. A largely covert conflict is already taking place between Iran and the United States. Iran has intervened in Iraq by providing financial and military support for Shiite militia groups, and, more directly, by sending agents and officials there. Iraq's Shiite leaders have long had close ties to Iran, where many of them lived in exile during Saddam's rule, and they and the Kurds have, without visible success, sought greater coöperation between Iran and the U.S. over security in Iraq. Many Sunnis, meanwhile, are distrustful of any dealings with Iran, and are unabashed about their hostility.

Sheikh Zaidan offered a vision of how the conflict in Iraq could escalate to the advantage of the Sunnis: "I think America will be able to start a Shia-Shia civil war in the south—with the Arab Shia, the tribes, being supported by the U.S., and the Persian Shiites supported by Iran." He said that this would be an opportunity for the Americans to "cut off the head of Iran's government and its militias in Iraq." The Sunnis could help in this fight, he suggested.

The likelihood of Zaidan's scenario being played out depends, to a large extent, on how the Iranians, the Americans, and the Iraqi Shiites choose to shape their ongoing competition for influence. Political moderates may broker a settlement. But Zaidan's views are shared by many in the Sunni community, where extremist positions still have a hold. At one roadblock in Ghazaliya, I spoke with a Ghazaliya Guardian, a twenty-six-year-old Sunni who identified himself as Officer Ahmed. He told me that he thought a purge of Shiites from power in Baghdad, such as that proposed by Zaidan, was a good idea. When I asked Officer Ahmed how his neighborhood had gone from being a bastion of the insurgency to a model of coöperation, his response was vague. "When the Ghazaliya Guardians started, the terrorists disappeared," he said. "We don't know where they are now." He had been elsewhere during the fighting, he said, and returned only when it was over.

I found the young Guardian's story of the recent past—in which he had merely tried to keep his head down until things blew over—unconvincing. In most of my conversations with the Iraqis working with the Americans, their true motivations struck me as unknowable. The Americans, no doubt driven by an urgent need to establish greater security, to be able to draw down troops, seemed all too willing to take their new allies at face value.

At J.S.S. Thrasher, Brooks and his men conducted raids several times a week, usually after dark. The raids were generally the result of tips from residents who called in to a hot line manned twenty-four hours a day by Iraqi interpreters, known as Terps; during daily patrols, Brooks's men passed out flyers with the phone number. "We say, 'If anyone threatens you, give a call.' The foot patrols are key: when you see someone walking down your street, when you see a face—it's different," Brooks said. "As a tank commander, I found it funny—the first thing I had to do was tell my tankers to get out and walk."

Brooks said that he had wanted to be a tank commander ever since he was a boy ("I love tanks"). After high school, in Springdale, Arkansas, he had gone to the New Mexico Military Institute, in Roswell, and afterward joined the Kansas Army National Guard. He was in the U.S. Armor Officer Basic Course during the attacks of September 11th, and in 2003 was sent to Iraq. He was eleven months into his second fifteen-month deployment. Brooks and his men had been told that they might be home for Christmas, but nobody was getting his hopes up too much yet.

One night, I went along on a raid, which Brooks designated Operation Muttonchops, because the main target was a man with a lot of facial hair. We drove from Thrasher in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle. The Americans had superimposed their own lexicon on the neighborhood's geography, to make it comprehensible to themselves. Just as Ghazaliya had been divided into three areas—Casino, Thrasher, and Maverick—all the major road arteries were referred to in Pentagonese: Red Falcon, Caradine, Vernon, Cecil, R.P.G. Alley, High Tension Road, and so forth. Few of the American soldiers knew how the locals referred to those same streets.

When the hydraulic rear hatch of the Bradley opened, I saw Iraqi and American soldiers running here and there, shouting, guns drawn. I followed some soldiers into a house. In the kitchen, a young American in full combat gear was bending over a man who was lying face down on the floor. The soldier cursed as he struggled to tie the man's hands behind his back with plastic handcuffs. A couple of half-eaten plates of food were on a table, along with a mobile phone, which rang repeatedly. In an adjacent room, another prone man was being trussed. A teen-age Iraqi, the younger brother of the two men, entered the kitchen and began to object; the American soldier handcuffed him as well. Pushing the teen-ager's face toward the floor, the soldier shouted, in English, "Shut the fuck up! Move your fucking head!"

A middle-aged woman in a flower-patterned smock emerged, sobbing, as the three brothers were moved outside. They were made to kneel, their cuffed hands behind their heads. A masked Terp held a photograph up next to each of the men's faces. As American soldiers inspected the teen-ager, who had peach fuzz on his chin, one muttered, "*This* isn't Muttonchops."

The three men were shoved down the street aggressively by the young soldier. (He was the only soldier I saw behave in that way; later, when he began berating women in another home, an officer told him to cool down.) After further consultation between the Americans and their masked Terps, it was decided that none of the three detainees were targets of the raid. Their handcuffs were cut, and they were told to go home.

The Americans now turned their attention to three other men, who were seated on a curb. One was a chubby adolescent. With him was a thin, scraggly-bearded youth in his early twenties and a man in his thirties. They explained that they had been sitting outside in the cool air, chatting and smoking. Their families, with several small children, were roused from bed. The Americans released the boy—he was fourteen years old—into his father's custody, but decided to take the two other men back to Thrasher.

I climbed into the Bradley, along with the older of the detainees, who was seated on the bench across from me. His hands had been bound, and he was trembling. The gunner of the Bradley leaned back, grabbed the detainee's T-shirt, and forced it over his head, like a hood. The disoriented man sat stiffly upright, and held his mouth open against the cloth around his face, as if to help himself breathe.

As it happened, an Iraqi whom I knew well had begun working for the Americans at a base under Colonel Burton's jurisdiction. I will call him Karim. He is a Shiite, and lives in a mixed Baghdad neighborhood just east of Ghazaliya. Karim said that he and a friend, whom I will call Amar (other names in their account have also been changed), had called in more than forty American raids, which had resulted in the capture of several dozen terrorists.

Karim said that, at first, he had welcomed the Mahdi Army, because it offered a measure of protection against Sunni extremists. But the militia had transformed itself into something like a Mafia organization, extorting money and abducting and murdering his neighbors—Shiites and Sunnis alike. The Mahdi Army men in their neighborhood, who regarded Karim and Amar as friends, had no idea that they were turning them in. Then Karim told me that it wasn't only the Mahdi Army that he was deceiving but the Americans, too.

Amar was a lifelong friend of Karim's. Three months earlier, Amar and his older brother, Jafaar, had been riding in the van of a friend, Sayeed, when a group of gunmen hailed them. Amar recognized them as Mahdi Army men, and assumed that they were coming to say hello. As Sayeed braked, the car was riddled with gunfire. Amar crouched as low as he could, as the Mahdi Army men emptied their Kalashnikovs. He was unhurt, but Jafaar and Sayeed were dead.

That night, Amar told Karim that, at the morgue, he had sworn over his brother's body to take revenge. He had vowed to kill a hundred Mahdi men—ten for each of Jafaar's fingers. His mother, Um Jafaar, supported him, and begged Karim to help her son. He agreed.

Their first concern was to make sure that the Mahdi militiamen didn't suspect them. During Jafaar's funeral procession, they shouted angry denunciations of a Sunni tribe that lived nearby. Word soon spread that Jafaar's family and friends blamed the Sunnis for his death.

Karim and Amar also decided that it would be easier to carry out the killings if they won the Americans' trust. Karim went to a nearby U.S. military base, and spoke to a captain. "I told the captain, 'You help me, I help you. I love my country, my neighbors. The Mahdi have killed many of my friends, and American soldiers, too. I want to coöperate.'" Karim gave the captain the names of two of the men who had killed Jafaar. The captain said that, if they were detained, Karim would get some money. He refused: "If I take it, it makes me a spy, and I am a gentleman, not a spy.'"

Karim put the captain in touch with Amar, who directed American soldiers to the houses where the two gunmen were staying. The operation was a success. "They found many guns and pistols," Karim said. "They took them, investigated, and they were convinced about what they were—killers. One was young, fifteen or sixteen, and had killed five or six people. He was just starting out. He is now in Bucca"—a U.S. prison camp in southern Iraq.

"Then the killing started," Karim told me. Their first victim was the father of the younger gunman. When I asked him whether the father had anything to do with Jafaar's killing, he looked nonplussed, and said no, but that the man had been an intelligence officer under Saddam, and had probably killed people, too. (In Iraq's tribal vendettas, male relatives are often seen as legitimate targets.) The father was now working as a taxi-driver. Karim told Amar's sister to wave him down as he left his house, and ask to be dropped off at a warehouse on the outskirts of a Sunni district. "Amar and I followed," he said. "She got out, and crossed the street. I told Amar, 'Do it now.'"

"We're supposed to attend a conference on business-casual ethics."

Amar drove in front of the taxi-driver, cutting him off. "Amar got out of the car and he shot him in the face. I had put five dumdums and four normal bullets in the gun, a SIG Sauer. One dumdum is enough to kill one man. I told him to shoot only four and keep some back, just in case, but he shot them all." (Afterward, according to Karim, Amar apologized. "He said, 'I couldn't help it. I became crazy.")

Next, they went to a Sunni sheikh whom Karim knew, whose brother was in the insurgency. The brother and his men kidnapped six Mahdi militiamen, including four who had been in the group that killed Jafaar. They took them to a house in Mansour, a Sunni district, where Karim and Amar met them. "They were tied up and their heads were covered. Amar beat them too much—not me," Karim said. "We were pretending to be Sunni mujahideen. We told them, 'If you tell the truth we release you, but if not we will kill you.' Of course, this was not the truth."

The men said that Sayeed had been their target; Jafaar just happened to be in the car. "They said they had killed Sayeed because he was a member of Badr"—the military wing of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a major rival of the Mahdi Army—"and worked with Americans. But this is not true. They killed him because he was rich and didn't respect the Mahdi Army. They were jealous."

Karim told me that he left before the interrogation was over, and didn't talk to Amar until the next day. "When I saw him, he kissed me. He said, 'I left three bodies near the train track, and two in Canal Street, to be taken to the morgue.'

"I said, 'No. 6, where is he?' Amar said, 'The sheikh's brother took him, because he thinks he killed his cousin.'"

The killing continued. After fifteen days, they went to Um Jafaar, Amar's mother. "I told her who was dead and who was in jail. She was very happy," Karim said. "Then she said, 'Do you want me to be completely comforted?'" Um Jafaar asked them to bring her parts of the dead men's bodies. Amar did what she asked.

"One man, he cut off his ear when he was still alive," Karim said. "But I swear that Amar has never killed anyone who was innocent."

Karim said that Amar had killed eighteen or twenty men. "After a while, I told Amar to stop this. My wife, also, was angry with me. I didn't like to do this, either, but we had to. We had to kill these guys, because they were killing too many people. When some of them were killed, my neighbors celebrated—sometimes even the Mahdi Army guys did."

Karim mentioned the American captain with whom Amar worked. "Amar is a friend of the captain, but he doesn't know about this." He added, "Amar was friends of the Mahdi—*real* friends. I have to be honest with you. If not for Jafaar's killing, he still would be."

Amar told Karim that he would not stop killing until he reached his goal of a hundred victims. "He is hungry for killing now," Karim said. "Sometimes I think maybe he *has* gone a little crazy."

In the next days, I confirmed that Amar was working with the American military; I also heard that he had been employed by a large private military contractor. Amar's case underscores one of the many dangers of fighting a war in a land where the culture and the language are incomprehensible to most of the soldiers. The U.S. military can do little without the assistance of local allies at every level, from collaborators like Amar to political leaders. Paradoxically, it is during the Americans' well-armed raids that their vulnerability in Iraq is most acutely on display. The Americans are always accompanied by their spectral Terps. They often act on tips whose sources are opaque, without knowing what lies behind them. Among the Iraqis I met who were working with the Americans, motives seemed to range from the pecuniary—a job and a good wage—to the patriotic, or a combination of both. But, in great measure, their ultimate loyalties must be taken on faith.

There have been some well-publicized embarrassments, such as when the U.S. Marines named a former Iraqi general to lead a militia, the so-called Falluja Brigade, to combat insurgents there in 2004. The general, it turned out, had been accused of involvement in Saddam-era atrocities against the Kurds. He was quickly replaced; months later, the brigade fell under suspicion of aiding insurgents, and was disbanded.

Amar's killing spree may not pose that sort of problem for the U.S. military—assuming that his victims really are all "bad guys." In wars, killing acquires a kind of perverse logic, and at times can come to be seen as part of the solution. Colonel Burton made it clear to me that he hadn't been sorry to hear that in the area under his command a notorious Shiite militia leader had been, as he put it, "whacked": "If he is gone, then it means that a big area that was influenced by him has been lifted from his control." Burton acknowledged, however, that the assassination of the Shiite militia leader had sparked a series of sectarian revenge killings; the neighborhood had to be placed under a "no-move policy." (I learned that the militia leader had been killed by the same man who had helped Amar kidnap six of his victims—the ones they had tortured before killing.)

Later, I told Colonel Burton that I had heard about Iraqis working with the U.S. who engaged in revenge killings. He responded, "Let me put it this way: I know that we do work with people who have provided information that has led to the capture of criminals and weapons caches. They have also called us and said they know where we can find the remains of people that we're looking for. There is a form of justice in Iraq that is traditional, but we do our best to get ahead of it."

Tribal vendettas have been an underlying feature of the Iraq war since it began. Amar's story may be unusual in the scale of his ambitions—a hundred men for his brother—but such crimes are common. At least some of the initial impetus for Iraq's insurgency came in the spring of 2003, when American troops in Falluja shot and killed seventeen demonstrators, and kinsmen of the dead sought revenge by killing Americans. In tribal families, it is often the matriarch who encourages the vendetta, as Amar's mother did.

Um Jafaar is a handsome, elderly woman. When I arrived at her home, with Karim, she was wearing a black abaya, and I noticed blue tribal tattoos on her chin and her hands. She invited me to sit down on a couch, and sat next to me in an armchair. Jafaar's three young daughters were watching us. When I asked Um Jafaar if she wanted revenge for her son's death, she got up from her chair, came over, and kissed the top of my head.

"Yes, I want revenge," she said. "I am a mother, and I lost my son for nothing." She began weeping, great wracking sobs. When she recovered, Um Jafaar pointed to her granddaughters. "Look, they have no father," she said. "Why?"

Um Jafaar went on to tell me that she took the body parts of Amar's victims, wrapped in cloth, to his grave, in the holy city of Najaf, and buried them there. "I talk to my son, I tell him, 'Here, this is from those who killed you, I take revenge.'" Moving one hand in a horizontal circle, she said, "I put them around the grave. So far, I have taken one hand, one eye, an Adam's apple, toes, fingers, ears, and noses." (Karim told me that the hand had made the house stink for days.) I asked her how many Mahdi men Amar had killed. "I don't know: eighteen, twenty? But still my heart hurts. Even if we kill all of them, I won't have comfort," she said.

"The Americans catch them and put them in jail," Um Jafaar went on. "This is not a solution, they have to be killed!" She turned to me: "Tell the American forces I am ready to fight with them against the Jaish al-Mahdi. I am a woman but I am ready. When you come here, we will sacrifice everything for you, because *you* did not kill my son. I pray for the Americans—even if they are Christians and Jews—and to the Prophet Muhammad, to protect you."

A few days earlier, Um Jafaar told me, she had been at the funeral of a Mahdi fighter, and had heard one of his comrades vow to avenge him: "He said, 'If before I decapitated them at the neck, now I will do it at their mouths.'" She made a hacking motion across her mouth.

Karim's cell phone rang. He answered it, and began speaking in Arabic. Afterward, he told me that it was Amar, who was out on an American patrol. "They have caught two Jaish al-Mahdi, and the Americans' Terps are making them dance at gunpoint," Karim said, laughing.

I asked if I could meet Amar. Karim said that he would see.

J.S.S. Maverick, in the southeast corner of Ghazaliya, was the quietest of the neighborhood's three Joint Security Stations. When I visited, in September, it had been two months since the last I.E.D. explosion. There was still danger but a certain tedium had set in to the soldiers' routines. "They hate the daily shit, like all soldiers do," an officer told me. "But they love not getting shot at or blown up by I.E.D.s every day"—which, until midsummer, was how it had been in Ghazaliya. "It's like going from cocaine to weed," he said.

I drove through Maverick with a crew in a Humvee. There were no people on the streets, and the senior soldier in the unit said, "I don't like it. Makes me expect something to go boom." The Humvee cut across a field, and halted where a suspicious-looking metal cannister lay in our path; the driver gave it a wide berth. As we made our way, very slowly because of the armored Humvee's weight—six tons—we approached a street that was covered in raw sewage. "Doo-doo water!" one of the men yelled. "Ooooh!" the others in the Humvee shouted in disgusted unison.

That evening, units from Maverick went on a "census mission"—part of a program aimed at creating a central register with the biometric profile of every military-age man living within its area, to help identify infiltrators. Iraqi police closed off either end of the street, as Americans and Terps searched each house. The

CLOUDBERRIES

You give me cloudberry jam from Lapland,
Bog amber, snow-line tidbits, scrumptious
Cloudberries sweetened slowly by the cold,
And costly enough for cloudberry wars
(Diplomatic wars, my dear).
                                        Imagine us
Among the harvesters, keeping our distance
In sphagnum fields on the longest day
When dawn and dusk like frustrated lovers
Can kiss, legend has it, once a year. Ah,
Kisses at our age, cloudberry kisses.

—*Michael Longley*

residents seemed to know what was expected of them. The men came forward politely and handed over their identification cards; an Army man took their photographs with an iris-scanning camera.

In theory, operations like this represent the advantage of moving U.S. soldiers into neighborhoods like Ghazaliya, where they can build relationships and glean intelligence, and that night's census was civil enough. But the constant raids and patrols can also alienate local residents, and reinforce the impression of the Americans as a coercive force with the overweening power to invade the homes of Iraqis, and detain them at will. The Army's tactics can become the catalyst that leads Iraqis to the insurgency.

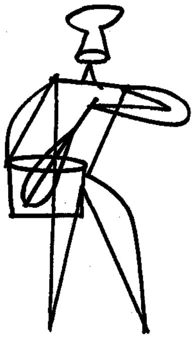
Maverick's area of Ghazaliya did not yet have a contingent of Guardians, and so the soldiers were using the Iraqi National Police, which is predominantly Shiite, as their auxiliaries. The national police in Ghazaliya, however, were suspected of being under the control of the Mahdi Army. The local police commander had recently been arrested and charged with helping carry out kidnappings and murders. A new police commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ahsin al-Khazragee, had been appointed, but the detachment remained a matter of concern. "No one trusts 'em," Lieutenant Matthew Holtzendorff, who led the census mission, told me. (The complaints go in both directions: while I was there, a truck belonging to Kellogg, Brown, and Root, the military contractor, had ploughed through barriers manned by the national police in Maverick's area, killing one policeman and badly injuring another, and then sped on without stopping. An Army officer told me that the incident was being investigated; K.B.R., when asked for comment, denied any knowledge of it.)

On the way back to Maverick, the convoy drove past a group of sullen-looking Iraqi police at a barricade, then pulled up in front of a well-tended middle-class home. A young boy opened the door, smiling when he saw Lieutenant Holtzendorff. We went inside, and were greeted warmly by a man in his thirties whom I will call Sabah, and who worked as a civil engineer inside the Green Zone. A few months earlier, Holtzendorff had saved Sabah from being kidnapped by the Iraqi police detachment down the street—the ones we had just passed. They had beaten him badly, and, most likely, had planned to kill him. Holtzendorff made a point of visiting Sabah regularly, to make it clear that he was under American protection.

Sabah was sweating, and he chain-smoked. He anxiously asked Holtzendorff where he had been; it had been two weeks since his previous visit. Holtzendorff explained that he had been called away, but said that he had asked his men to stop by every few days. They had, hadn't they? Sabah nodded and smiled, but his hands shook. After thirty minutes or so, despite Sabah's entreaties to stay longer, Holtzendorff stood up, promising to return.

Later, I discussed Sabah's case with one of the unit's officers. Developing a nonsectarian national police force is an essential part of the U.S. military's plan to disengage its own troops, but, as the officer saw it, the police were still part of the problem. "Please don't print my name, or Petraeus will kill me," he said. "The national police are supposed to be our salvation; all our hopes are pinned on them!" He added, "Balancing the Shia and the Sunni—the politics of it—that's the hardest part of my job. 'Hunt bad guy, kill bad guy'—O.K., that's what I'm trained to do. But they don't train you for this."

Colonel Ahsin, the newly appointed police chief in Maverick's area, is a punctilious man in his late thirties; when I joined him for an evening walkabout, on a street a few blocks from Maverick, I picked up the aroma of cologne. Ahsin was accompanied by Major Robert O'Brien, the American officer in charge of Maverick's National Police Transition Team, or N.P.T.T.s, known by all as Nip-its.



Three bodyguards moved around Colonel Ahsin like a protective fan. As we headed down the street, a mixture of homes and shops, Ahsin made a great display of courteousness to the stall keepers. At one stand, he popped a sweetmeat in his mouth. He bent down to tousle the hair of some small boys. As he walked on, an older man approached, and the bodyguards immediately huddled around him. The man complained that an Iraqi police car had collided with his car. Ahsin listened and then, in a loud voice, called out, "Maaa-jor!"

O'Brien trotted over, saying deferentially, "*Na'm, sayyidi*?" ("Yes, sir?"). Colonel Ahsin told O'Brien that he wanted to have the offending policeman arrested. "*Na'm, sayyidi*," O'Brien said, scribbling in his notebook. As we proceeded, this scene was repeated again and again: Ahsin gave orders to O'Brien, who obsequiously wrote them down. At one point, O'Brien smiled in my direction, and said, "This is the magic. Yeah!"

Later, I asked O'Brien what he knew about Colonel Ahsin. "All I know is that he was thirteen years in the special forces with Saddam's Army, and joined the national police in 2004," O'Brien said. They had known each other only a week and a half, but he thought that Ahsin was "fantastic."

I said that Ahsin seemed to enjoy the role of the Big Man.

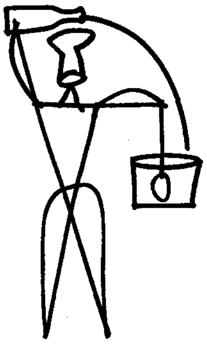
O'Brien flashed me a look. "Look, it works," he said quietly. "That's what I want. I *want* him to take charge. Some advisers want to take command, and we need them to." He paused. "It's like surfing, except that here we're surfing on top of a shit tidal wave, and we're just trying not to fall in." O'Brien laughed. "Saddam Hussein once said that the trick of counterinsurgency is to separate the people from the insurgents. That's what we're trying to do here. If the people like what you do more than what the others do, then you have a chance."

The Americans hoped that the Ghazaliya Guardians, the Sunni volunteer group, would serve as a new police force. Here, too, there were complications: General Petraeus had singled out the Guardians as a positive development, but the Shiites had a very different view. "The policy adopted by the Iraqi government, along with the Coalition, has been to *disband* armed militia groups," an official of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq said. He acknowledged that Iraq's security force was a "weak and sick body," ridden with militias, and needed to be reformed. "But the solution is not to bring new forces onto the scene, ones that people have doubts about."

The Americans, the Shiite official said, were arming the Sunni volunteers without adequately looking into their backgrounds. "There are a lot of stories now that some of those involved in the

Awakening were known to be very dangerous criminals in their areas," he said. He mentioned hard-line insurgent groups like the 1920 Revolution Brigades and the Islamic Army, whose members have joined volunteer groups. "Now they're walking around armed, with uniforms and badges that allow them to go into places normally permitted only to Iraqi security forces." He added, "There must be mechanisms put into place to insure that these people's loyalties are to Iraq and its government—before they get stronger and have their own controlled territories."

On a clear morning in late September, about a dozen members of the Ghazaliya Guardians mustered at a small public marketplace to meet Captain Brooks. Dressed in matching cream-colored shirts, khaki pants, and beige baseball caps, they resembled security guards for a golf course. Their only noticeable insignia were small shoulder badges showing the Iraqi flag. (Colonel Burton had told me, "The guys in Ghazaliya, now, they're militaristic, pretty well dressed, pretty professional; a lot of them are former Iraqi Army guys.") Their leader, a portly middle-aged man with a notebook, greeted Captain Brooks attentively.



This was an important day for the Guardians. After three months under Iraqi Army supervision, they were about to be allowed to man roadblocks on their own—just the sort of transition that the Shiite official worried about. Their leader conducted Brooks to several spots around the intersection, which he proposed as the Guardians' checkpoints. At the first, Brooks said, "You wouldn't want to fight from here; you need a place you can retreat to." The Guardian pointed to a row of buildings, and suggested that it might be an ideal place for a Guardian office, where his men could rest. Brooks said, "I don't want you hunkered down," and that, instead, they should set up a stall in the market, with an awning.

As Captain Brooks walked around, a shopkeeper came up to him and pointed to the sewage in the street. Brooks said that he would send in the "suck truck" to remove it. Another man complained about electricity, and a third said that the neighborhood needed a water truck, "to keep the dust down." Brooks rolled his eyes. "I can fix a lot of things," he said. "But I can't do much about dust."

After he moved on, Brooks was approached by a woman who said that her son, a member of the Guardians, had recently been arrested. She had heard nothing more of him since.

As she was speaking, gunshots rang out from the other side of the marketplace: a Guardian had fired off warning shots when a vehicle did not heed his command to halt. Brooks sent his men over with orders to check out the position: "See if it can be fixed so people have more time to react." Turning back to the woman, he told her that he would try and find out about her son. He said that, in a few days, an office would open nearby, where residents could get information about detainees.

It was now midday; the heat was intense, and Brooks was getting impatient. He was besieged by another group of shopkeepers, who complained about a trash-strewn field next to their stalls. Brooks pointed to a large wire-mesh basket; it was one of several that his soldiers had placed in vacant lots around Ghazaliya. He noted that it was nearly empty, and that garbage had been dumped all around it. He challenged them: "Why should I care about your garbage if the people here don't?"

We climbed back into the Humvee and drove off. As we were leaving the marketplace, Brooks yelled for the driver to stop, and leaped out of the Humvee, cursing loudly. He strode up to a man who sat under a tree behind a table that was laden with chocolate, potato chips, cigarettes, and some cheap plastic toys. Brooks grabbed a plastic pistol and a toy AK-47 off the table and brandished them in the face of the vender. "What are these?" he shouted. The vender, who had smiled anxiously as Brooks approached, now crumpled with apprehension. "They're just toys, for babies," he said placatingly, still forcing himself to smile. A tall masked Terp named Leo was translating for Brooks.

"You're an idiot!" Brooks shouted. Leo said something to the man in Arabic. "What do you think will happen if one of my soldiers sees this pointed at him at night?" Brooks waved the toy pistol in the man's face. "You will kill more children in this area than Al Qaeda!" Brooks demanded a reply. Leo spoke again to the vender, who said that he was not the only person selling toy guns; there was a stall in front of Ghazaliya's municipal offices. "Everyone sells them," he said.

Brooks listened stonily. Then he stepped back and spat on the ground in front of the vender's table. Shaking a fist, he said, "You make me sick, you killer of children," and wheeled around to leave. Stopping a few feet away, he turned back again and kicked a cloud of dust toward the vender. "Let's go!" he shouted. Brooks was silent for the return journey to J.S.S. Thrasher.

Back at the base, I asked Leo about the exchange. He said that he had not translated "exactly" what Captain Brooks had said: "His words were very insulting, you know. If I had told him exactly, the man would have been very offended."

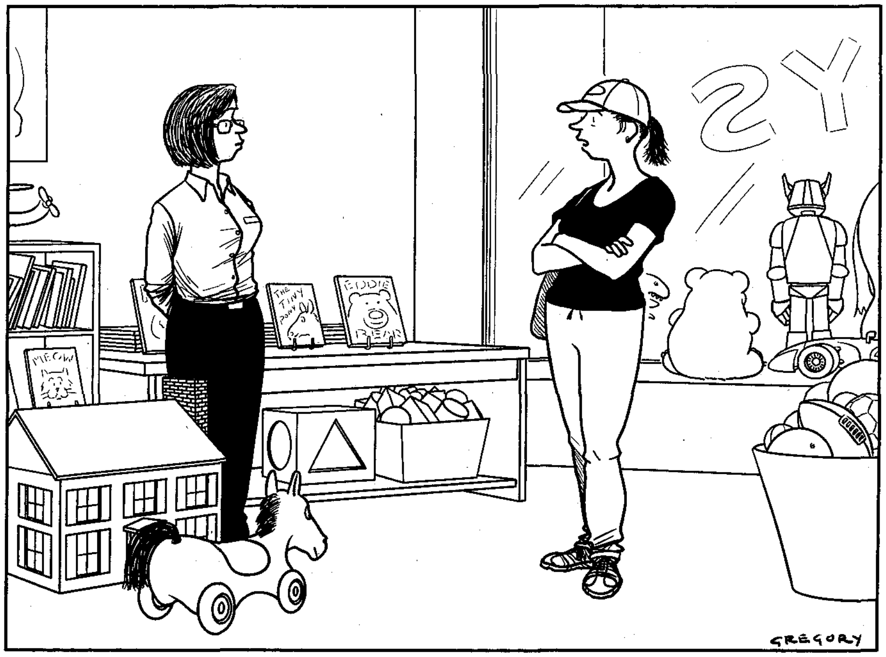
Several days after I saw Um Jafaar, Karim arranged a meeting for me with Amar. A stocky man in his mid-thirties, Amar had a close-shaven head and a lumpy, fleshy face with a thick mustache. There was an unnervingly serene air about him, and I found it difficult to look him in the eye for very long.

Amar spoke in a matter-of-fact monotone. "Jafaar had ten fingers; each one of his fingers was worth ten Jaish al-Mahdi guys," he said. "So I decided to take my revenge against a hundred of them. So far, I have taken my revenge against twenty."

Did he count those he had helped the Americans capture? I asked.

Amar shook his head. "Some are now in prison," he said. "If they are released, I will kill them. If they are not released, I will kill their brothers or their fathers. Today, I have one in my mind." He and Karim spoke in Arabic for a moment. Turning to me, Karim said, "Yes, this man deserves it. He's killed, like, three hundred people in Baghdad."

Amar mentioned a nearby neighborhood. "I take most of the people and kill them there," he said. "It's two minutes from Hay al-Adil, a Sunni district. The



"Do you have any educational DVDs that are between one and a half to two years long?"

Jaish al-Mahdi think the people of Hay al-Adil are killing them." Amar smiled wanly. "They come with me, as my friends. They trust me, the Jaish al-Mahdi." Amar said that he would also invite the Mahdi men to a warehouse he owned—"to eat or to drink, or to race pigeons. I make up different stories." Once there, he usually put a drug in their tea or sprinkled it on dates he offered them. "They fall asleep, then I shoot them in the head." Sometimes, he slit their throats.

"Americans are too honorable, too clean," he said. "They have to kill these people. They are dirty. Anyway, if they don't kill them, I will. But helping the Americans arrest them helps them not suspect me."

Before Jafaar's death, Amar had made mistakes—drinking, women. In seeking revenge, he had become closer to God, and that, he said, had kept him going. "God wants me to kill these people. It is *haram* to kill cats, but it is good to kill the Jaish al-Mahdi," he said. "They have strangled honest Sunni people in front of me. I feel no difference between me and the Sunni; I feel very angry about that. The Mahdi are not like they were before; they kill Shia or Sunni, for whatever reason. If I go to Hell, I will be comfortable, because I took my revenge." He added, "Honestly, it was only after the first one that I didn't sleep well, because I had not killed before. But afterward it felt normal."

Last week, I spoke again to Karim. He told me that something had happened—there was now reason to believe that the Mahdi Army had become aware of Amar's involvement in the killings. Karim was urging him to leave Baghdad, at least for a while. If he didn't, there was a good chance that he would be a target. For the moment, though, Amar was simply lying low.

One afternoon, sitting with Captain Brooks in Thrasher's rooftop gym, I asked if he felt that what he was doing in Iraq was appreciated by the people back home. "Oh, yeah," he said. Turning to one of his N.C.O.s, who was seated nearby, smoking a cigar, he asked, "What do you think, Sergeant Cochran?"

Lowering his voice, Cochran replied, "When that bullet goes by my head, all the politics goes right out the window. My only thought is to get my men out of there alive."

"Thanks for quoting 'Black Hawk Down,' Sergeant Cochran," Brooks drawled. Turning back to me, he said, "When I went home the last time, we went skiing in Colorado. Everywhere we went, people thanked me. One man said, 'I don't support the war but I support the soldiers.' I can accept that. We have a system that allows freedom of speech. Hell, I put on the uniform to defend that."

Brooks seemed to feel that what he and his men were doing in Iraq was worthwhile. He felt that, for now, the country needed the U.S. military, as much for its peacekeeping duties as for its combat role. "In the Sunni population, there is still fear of Shia militias, and fear that violence will start again," Captain Brooks said. "We've seen efforts by Al Qaeda in Iraq to reignite sectarian violence, but, to the people's credit, nothing really reignited, and has not yet." He knocked on a wooden table in front of him. "There's still a lot of work to be done on national reconciliation in this area. Ghazaliya is a microcosm of what Iraq faces as a whole. The Iraq Study Group said national reconciliation was essential, and I agree. Until Iraqis work out the Sunni-Shia sectarian issues, they're going to have a very tough time making meaningful or lasting progress."

I asked Brooks if he planned to stay in the Army after his tour ended. He gave me a candid look, and said he hadn't made up his mind yet. "I want to go on vacation when I get home and then decide," he said.

When I asked how long he thought the U.S. would remain in Iraq, Brooks thought for a while, and said, "I'm not just blowing smoke up your ass, but it really depends on what the U.S. civilian-controlled government decides its goals are and what it tells the military to do."

Brooks continued, "Things are going well. Just about everything we wanted to achieve on a local level, we've achieved. It's counterinsurgency, it's different from what one would normally associate with war—i.e., 'victory is won.' I feel that winning will be a point you never realize that you're there—that at some indeterminate point you'll look back and realize that you've won." ♦

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An audio interview with Jon Lee Anderson and more photographs from Iraq by Johan Spanner.

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE PLAYER KINGS

How the rivalry of Orson Welles and Laurence Olivier made Shakespeare modern.

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT

After playing in Paris, Hamburg, and the British military post at the remains of the concentration camp at Belsen, the Old Vic Theatre Company arrived in New York in April, 1946, on a victory tour for a battered but triumphant Western culture. Ticket prices were high, but lines at the box office were long and the atmosphere was frenzied with anticipation. The company opened with Shakespeare—"Henry IV," Parts One and Two—and continued with Chekhov, Sophocles, and Sheridan: six weeks of repertory, fifty classically trained British actors, even a small orchestra in the pit. Although top billing was shared by the company's two leading actors, Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier, there was no doubt who the star really was. Playing valiant Hotspur on opening night, Olivier employed a nervous stutter that made the exalted (and possibly intimidating) language startlingly real. The following night, in Part Two, he was unrecognizable in the minor role of ancient Justice Shallow, whom he played as a fixated beekeeper—an occupation that Shakespeare had failed to mention—upstaging Richardson, in the larger role of Falstaff, by continually swatting at imaginary bees. More brazenly virtuosic was the contrast between Sophocles' Oedipus and the giddy eighteenth-century dandy Mr. Puff, in Sheridan's "The Critic": Olivier left the stage with his eye sockets streaming blood and returned, after a brief intermission, prancing in lace and a powdered wig. The *Times*, speaking for the conquered city, noted, "The spring seems to be given over to Laurence Olivier."

This was not the spring that Orson Welles had planned. In March, just before the Old Vic's impending visit made the news, he had announced the rebirth of the famous Mercury Theatre, starting with a musical extravaganza based on "Around the World in Eighty Days." Soon, however, tales of disaster started drifting in from out-of-town tryouts. Forty-five tons of sets, a sixteen-hundred-pound mechanized elephant, and a Japanese circus were making for an epic level of chaos: on the eve of the show's Broadway opening, the *Times* compared the backstage scene, perhaps inevitably, to Kane's warehouse. Although several critics appreciated Welles's old-fashioned showmanship—he promised a reporter that he was equally prepared to "act Hamlet and do a roller-skating act" to sell the show—"Around the World" closed in less time than its hero took to circle the globe. Welles, saddled with enormous debts and thousands of unsold souvenir books, spoke nostalgically of 1937, when there was widespread hope that he would single-handedly create an American national theatre: "I was the Laurence Olivier of that year."

The twentieth century's two greatest dramatic illusionists had more in common and, ultimately, more effect on each other's work—as friendly, if occasionally cutthroat, competitors; as reinventors of Shakespeare for a modern audience—than has been noted even in the mountains of books that each has inspired. By 1946, comparison was unavoidable, and not just because Welles and Olivier were occupying theatres a few blocks apart. Growing up an ocean apart, they had emerged independently, in the mid-thirties, as the biggest theatre personalities and Shakespeare revolutionaries of the age. Barely out of his teens, Welles directed a sensational all-black "Macbeth," in Harlem; Olivier—eight years Welles's senior—was twenty-seven when he gave a performance of Romeo so painfully, youthfully awkward that London critics accused him of not knowing how to speak verse. To the wider public, they were, moreover, Mr. Rochester and Heathcliff: their film portrayals of these Brontë heartthrobs had turned them into full-fledged movie stars. And each was now paired with a matching screen goddess: Olivier was married to Vivien Leigh (who very noticeably accompanied him to New York) and Welles to Rita Hayworth (who just as noticeably stayed home). Yet neither was instinctively or even happily a movie actor. Rare in the post-Stanislavsky age, both lived in professional thrall to the infinite possibilities of false noses, padding, wigs, and generally disguising or (better yet) disfiguring makeup. Welles called it "camouflage," suggesting more profound similarities between the men, since these physical transformations allowed the actor, as Olivier later explained, "to avoid anything so embarrassing as self-representation."

This theatrical ideal had already got them both into trouble. Despite the swooning female audience, Welles's flamboyant portrayal of Mr. Rochester, in the 1943 film "Jane Eyre," had earned him reviews that he complained were "the worst accorded to an American actor since John Wilkes Booth." He had agreed to take a mere acting job only after his career as Hollywood's wunderkind—at twenty-five, he had co-written, produced, directed, and starred in "Citizen Kane"—came to an unhappy end, with his failure to prove that art could turn a profit. Still, he remained a fearsome presence. The unassuming director of "Jane Eyre," Robert Stevenson, was clearly too intimidated to bully Welles the way William Wyler had bullied Olivier when, at the start of work on "Wuthering Heights," in 1938, the cocky British stage star offered the same sort of grandstanding performance. Olivier had rebuffed Wyler's corrections by informing him that his chosen medium was "too anemic to take great acting." But Wyler persisted, and Olivier credited him for the rest of his life with teaching him how to act in films. And more: with teaching him to respect the medium, assuring him that there was nothing in literature, not even Shakespeare, that a film could not encompass.

The most difficult role for Olivier dur-

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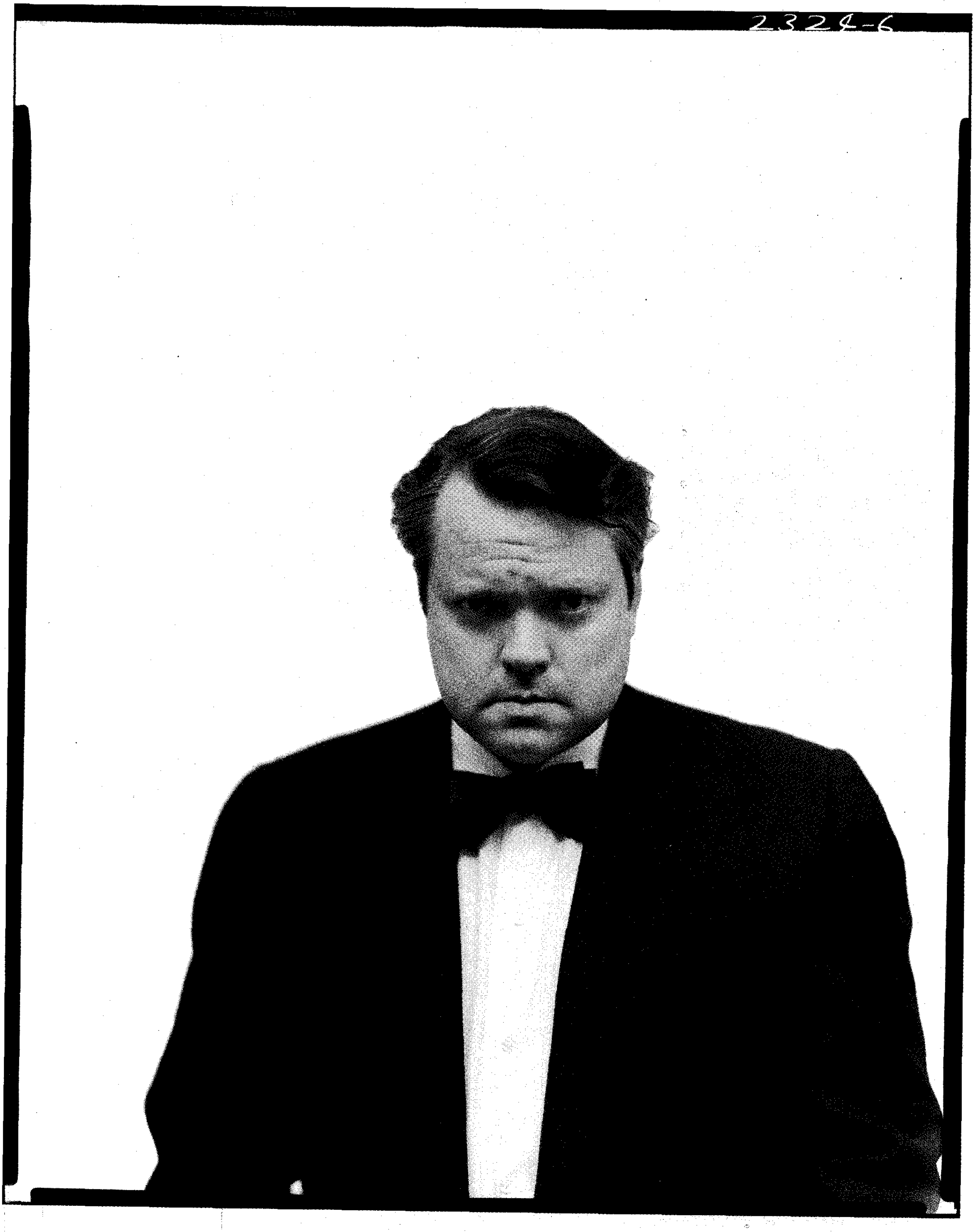


Orson Welles, photographed by Richard Avedon, in New York, in 1955.

ing his early years onstage was Henry V. Its problems were the opposite of those he had with film: Shakespeare's blazing soldier-king was too unhesitatingly bold, his speeches too fervently jingoistic ("God for Harry! England and St. George!") to suit the young actor's comfort. Olivier later explained that he had been "frightened of the heroism" at the heart of "Henry V" because the feeling throughout England during the nineteen-thirties was against heroics, inclining instead toward the languid elegance of the immensely popular Noël Coward. Then came the war. And Olivier, performing a one-man show for British troops, discovered that Henry's clarion calls to arms had a powerful effect on real and unquestionably heroic soldiers. He went on to read Henry's speeches on national radio, and by 1943 he had a motion picture in the works. Seeking a director, he had asked Wyler, who passed him to John Ford, who found the idea that he might direct Shakespeare very funny. When other candidates fell through, Olivier himself took on the job, becoming the director, producer, and star of the most important English movie yet made—which was what he had hoped for all along.

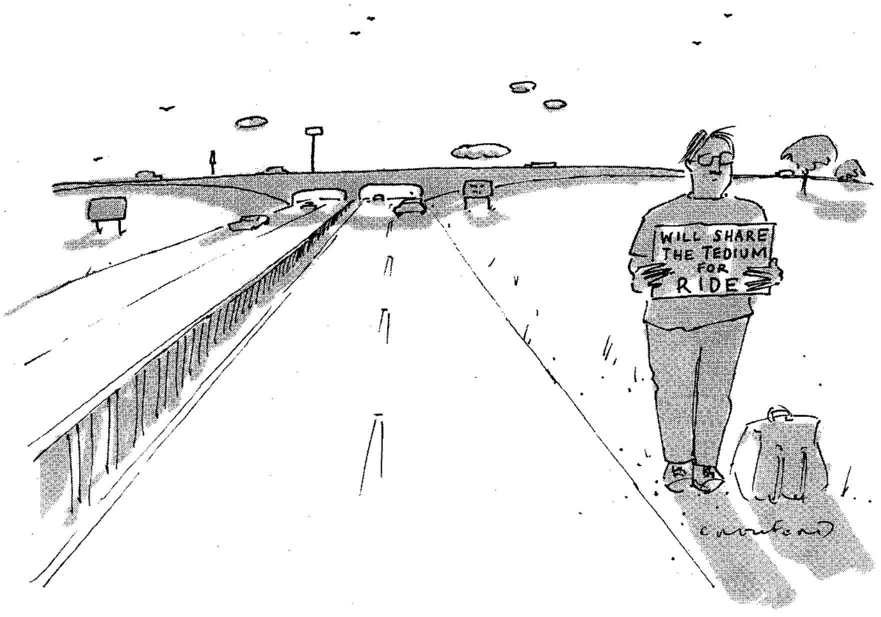
The problem with converting Shakespeare to the movies was the disparity between the language and modern reality. Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle's spectacular film of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (1935) and George Cukor's equally lavish "Romeo and Juliet" (1936)—the most expensive Shakespeare films made after the advent of sound—had both been box-office flops. Olivier, to prepare his audience for the linguistic shock, began "Henry V" with a performance of the play in the Globe Playhouse, circa 1600, with a cast of heavily rouged and floridly versifying actors (including Olivier, playing the actor playing Henry) working a rapt if obstreperous crowd: the mere mention of Falstaff raises a cheer; a reminder that the King has banished the old rogue brings a roar of outrage. The contemporary audience gets to see Shakespeare taken down from his pedestal, even while it adjusts to highly wrought Elizabethan speech as the only sort proper for an Elizabethan theatre. And then, just as we are feeling comfortable, Olivier's camera leaves the theatre behind and, almost imperceptibly at first, moves out into the world. As real breezes begin to blow, the actors disappear into their characters, their flighty vocal lines dissolve into meaning—"Now sits the wind fair," Olivier softly breathes—and the story is being told directly to us.

Olivier then insures that the film is too unnaturally beautiful ever to be confused with reality. "Henry V" is a storybook pageant shot in the saturated artificialities of Technicolor; even the climactic battle at Agincourt is beautiful, with its knights in silver armor, its deep-blue sky, its bright-green grass. The only color notably absent from the battle is red: despite the reported thousands of enemy dead, no blood is shed. For, in addition to finding a visual poetry equivalent to Shakespeare's language, Olivier intended to turn the play's political meaning upside down. By judiciously cutting such episodes as Henry's order to kill all prisoners of war, he masked the King's brutality and, with it, Shakespeare's ironies about the ways of power.

Furthering this agenda, Olivier devised a way to effectively film Henry's big vocal climaxes (without showing his tonsils, or forcing himself to underplay) by pulling the camera ever farther back, to reveal—in the most famous instance—a field of soldiers gazing up toward the King astride a white horse that rears and tears away ("God for Harry! England and St. George!") on his last echoing syllable. And when, on the eve of battle, Henry reflects on the burdens of his crown, Olivier's troubled face is shot very close, his lips unmoving; heard in voice-over, his speech seems to take us deep into the mind of Shakespeare's "warlike Harry," where no audience had been before. This was the king and the picture that England required in 1943, a picture dedicated "To the Commandos and Airborne Troops of Great Britain."

"Henry V" opened in New York in the spring of 1946, just days after the Old Vic had closed to sold-out crowds. The film had been a success in London, and, despite all warnings about the taste of "the great unwashed," Olivier's loyal backers refused to cut it for American consumption. And, clean or dirty, the Americans came, and they kept on coming, not only in New York but in twenty cities across the country. Whether spurred by an admiration for British wartime courage, or by a *Time* cover story titled "Masterpiece," or by a creeping rumor that the film mixed familiar duty with actual pleasure, they turned "Henry V" into a box-office phenomenon. It broke the language barrier, the class barrier, the culture barrier: the opening scene of a broad audience comfortably enjoying its greatest literature looked—thanks to the film itself—a little like us.

To Welles, the great roller-skating Hamlet-reciting democrat of the American theatre, "Henry V" was a mine of possibility and provocation. He had known Olivier at least since 1939, when they had performed together in one of Welles's weekly radio dramas. By the time of "Henry V," Welles was struggling with a reputation as a film director inca-


WILL SHARE THE TEDIUM FOR RIDE

pable of commercial success ("Citizen Kane") or, worse, incapable of finishing his films ("The Magnificent Ambersons," "It's All True"). But he appears to have viewed Olivier with warmth, as perhaps his only equal. Then, too, the pair were comrades in arms against the plummy British style of playing Shakespeare that prevailed in New York in the performances of Maurice Evans (Welles once claimed that he went to Hollywood to escape from Evans) and in London with John Gielgud. Although Olivier was only a few years younger than Gielgud, he seemed to represent a new generation, consciously opposing the old-fashioned style of "singing" verse—more melody than meaning—with a direct and even dangerous power that frequently put critics in mind of beasts of prey. Welles was not intimidated. But he had not been overawed by "Henry V," beyond the fact of its success. He later remarked that the battle of Agincourt looked as though it were taking place on a golf course—which was to say that the film failed to make a connection between the characters and the outside world. He was sure that he could do better. To prove it, he started shooting "Macbeth" the following spring.

Welles saw Shakespeare as something of an American. He was still in his teens when, in 1934, he collaborated with his former schoolmaster Roger Hill—one of the important father figures in his life—on an edition of the plays titled "Everybody's Shakespeare," which was designed to shake off the dust of the classroom and get readers to put on the plays in their local gymnasiums, dance halls, or back yards. Shakespeare belonged to us as much as to anyone: the playwright's England, like present-day America, was "a kid of a country," as Welles wrote in his introduction, "bounding blithely into the sunny, early morning of modern times."

The blithely bounding George Orson Welles was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in 1915, and had been performing Shakespeare ever since he commandeered the theatre department of Hill's Illinois boarding school, which provided the only formal education that he ever had, and his only steady home. Welles's parents had separated when he was four, after his artistically ambitious mother took up with the family physician—who, as the official discoverer of Welles's "genius," was the other significant father figure in his life. By his own account, Welles was too busy fulfilling this genius to waste time being a child. In Chicago, where his family (and the good doctor) had moved, he became the star of his mother's musical salon, while his father, whose tastes ran more to vaudeville and magic shows, descended into drunkenness. Welles's mother died after a lingering illness when Orson was nine. His father died suddenly when the boy was fifteen; for much of his life, Welles firmly believed that his rejection of his father's affections had killed him.

He was playing Tybalt in Katharine Cornell's polite and predominantly British production of "Romeo and Juliet," on Broadway, in 1934, when a would-be impresario in the audience, John Houseman, felt the earth shake on the entrance of the furiously energetic boy, whose rich mahogany voice "tore like a high wind through the genteel, modulated voices of the well-trained professionals around him." Houseman eagerly hitched his fortunes to the unknown nineteen-year-old actor, becoming Welles's producer, promoter, factotum, confidant, and general caretaker through a series of productions that made New York theatre history. Although Welles starred in several of these shows, his greatest gift proved to be for directing—and for making the director the star. After the Harlem "Macbeth" and Marc Blitzstein's socialist saga "The Cradle Will Rock," in 1937 Welles and Houseman founded the Mercury Theatre, in the commercial heart of Broadway. Their opening production, "Julius Caesar," dressed in Fascist uniforms and lit with piercing shafts of "Nuremberg" lights, turned Shakespeare into the hottest political dramatist of the nineteen-thirties.

Tall and boyishly good-looking, Welles cut an ideally princely figure, yet he padded himself out to play the fat old comic knight Sir John Falstaff, in the Mercury's biggest production ever: "Five Kings," a mosaic that he pieced together from the "Henry" cycle. Biographers have been quick to note the relevance of the filial drama in these plays to Welles's life: Prince Hal, torn between two fathers—the calculating Henry IV, the scalliwag Falstaff—banishes Falstaff upon taking the throne, causing the loving old man's heart literally to break. Welles himself called this "triangle" the greatest story Shakespeare ever told. But the vast requirements of "Five Kings" underscored the difficulties in the way that Welles achieved his goals: distracted and disorganized, working half the night and partying the other half, keeping his spirits up with vast quantities of food and brandy—his most perceptive biographer, Simon Callow, calls Welles's theatre "a temple of adrenaline"—teetering on the brink of failure and then soaring upward on a last-minute stroke of what everyone wearily agreed to call genius. But sometimes the chaos proved beyond redemption. Houseman observed that even a minor reversal sent Welles to his bed, where he lay for days "like a sick child, convinced that he was going to die." And "Five Kings" was a major reversal: a shapeless five-hour catastrophe that closed in Philadelphia in March, 1939, taking the Mercury Theatre with it. Welles kept the scenery in storage while he went to Hollywood to earn the money—it was to be just a quick trip to the vulgar fleshpots—to get his Falstaff back onstage.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Orson Welles is the biggest menace that's come to Hollywood for years," F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in a short story at the time, joking that the East Coast genius would force the studios to "start all over again," as they did with sound. That is not far from what seemed to be happening when "Citizen Kane" was released, in 1941: multiple points of view, overlapping dialogue, and, the most renowned of its innovations, deep-focus photography, by means of which figures in the background were rendered as clear as those close up. Welles's cinematographer, Gregg Toland, had been striving to perfect the technique for years, and the result was a diamond-pointed black-and-white—the effect was almost impossible on color stock—that made complex relationships tell at a glance: while Kane's grimly determined mother signs the agreement that will send her son away forever, the unsuspecting boy is viewed through a distant window, playing in the snow. But the core of Welles's revolution was to set the camera free, physically and dramatically. Gazing up at a suddenly towering figure, or rushing excitedly down a corridor toward a door that has just slammed shut—almost pruriently interested in what is going on behind it—the camera becomes a seemingly subjective intelligence, part of the story that it tells. Although this formal excitement was eventually to have enormous repercussions, none of the era's big directors, not even the ones who subsequently worked with Toland—William Wyler, Howard Hawks, George Cukor—seemed to regard Welles's achievement as a serious model. The only exception, working far from Hollywood, was Laurence Olivier.

Olivier's début as Othello, with Britain's National Theatre, in 1964.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SNOWDON, CAMERA PRESS/RETINA LTD.

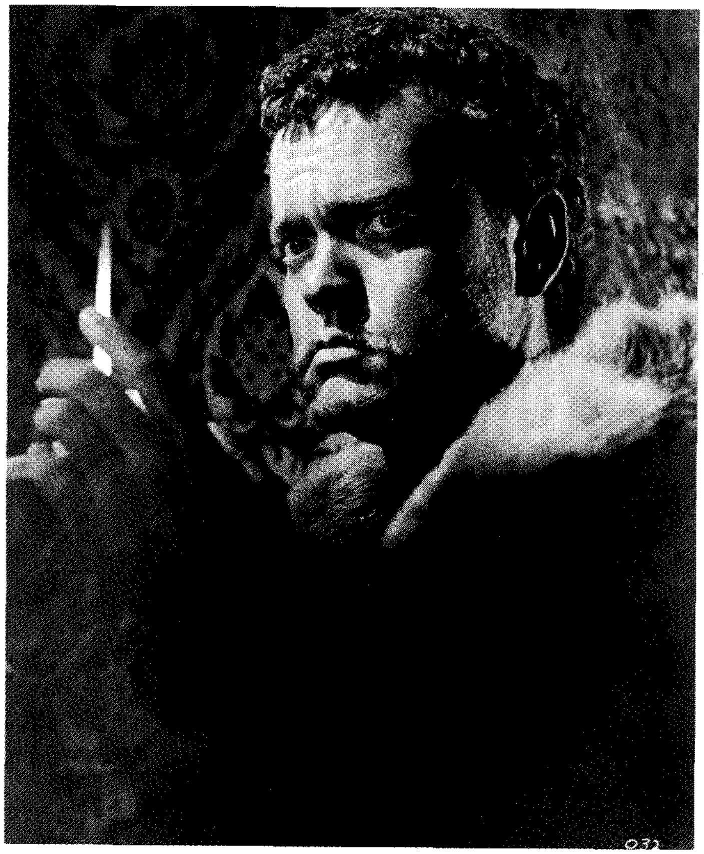
On New Year's Day, 1947, Olivier resolved to take on what he called "the big one": direct, produce, and star in "Hamlet." He cut the play himself: individual lines, subplots, characters—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Fortinbras—all were omitted for the sake of a clear story line and a running time of two and a half hours. He abandoned the use of Technicolor, because, he later explained, "I thought it would be rather fun to do a black-and-white . . . and really show them some things in the way of focus"—that is, Welles and Toland's deep focus. "I could create distances between characters, giving an effect of alienation, or of yearning for past pleasure, as when Hamlet sees Ophelia," he wrote, "an eternity away down the long corridor . . . sitting on a solid wooden chair—in focus—with love clearly in her eyes." This has been called the longest-distance love scene ever filmed.

But the more arresting love scenes for most viewers occurred between Hamlet and his mother: lingering kisses, a confrontation played across Gertrude's marital bed. (Awful to say, aside from predictably "phallic" interpretations of towers, pillars, and knives, one critic has compared the bed to "a giant vagina.") The Oedipal interpretation derived from Olivier's first stage performance of the role, in 1937, when the director Tyrone Guthrie took him to meet with the Freudian analyst Ernest Jones, the author of "The Oedipus-Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery"; even before that, it had been part of John Barrymore's "Hamlet," which electrified Olivier as a seventeen-year-old drama student in 1925. Nevertheless, biographers have not had to look very hard for Olivier's own Oedipal motivations—no harder than for Welles's motivations in his obsession with Falstaff—since Olivier once said that his first childhood memory was of his mother's breasts "in a black lace sort of thing," and that his father had disliked him from the moment he was born.

A poor Anglican clergyman, Gerard Olivier had found the birth of Laurence, his third child, an undue expense. Although in his youth Olivier found his father's miserliness a perpetual torment, it was the grand ritual of church that established his love for theatre, which remained his religion all his life. His early delight in performing was encouraged by his mother—"my heaven, my hope, my entire world, my own worshipped Mummy"—who died when he was twelve years old and away at school. Even Vivien Leigh believed that, in "Hamlet," he was confronting this insupportable loss. (On the paternal side, Olivier's beady-eyed, cagey Justice Shallow was said to have been a dead ringer for Gerard, and to have sent his stepmother weeping from the stalls.)

In theatrical terms, the Freudian interpretation—which posited that Hamlet hesitated to kill Claudius because he identified with the man who shared his mother's bed—allowed the Prince to be shown as a strong, if tortured, man, rather than as the sensitive weakling that the Victorians had popularized, and that Gielgud still played to perfection. (Olivier called this the "castrated" tradition.) The truly shocking aspect of Olivier's stage performance was his daunting physical power. This, too, came out of Barrymore's emphatically American, swashbuckling Hamlet, which Olivier said had "put the balls back" in the role, but which he outdid in virility and athletic risk. Critics had announced that Olivier was tremendously exciting, if "entirely without melancholy," and entirely wrong. This criticism may account for the fact that his film offers an extremely melancholy Dane. His acrobatic strength is still occasionally visible—he makes a perilous fifteen-foot dive onto Claudius while finally carrying out his revenge—but such feats do not comport with the Gielgudian wistfulness of the performance; in his grander moments, moreover, Olivier has a Victorian staginess unlike anything else he did on film. His frequent use of voice-over in the soliloquies, so effective as contrast in "Henry V," reduces the lengthy workings of Hamlet's mind to murmuring monotony. (Is this what thought is really like?) The performance suggests that playing weakness was Olivier's greatest weakness.

The true star of "Hamlet" is the camera. The film is shot as though it were a nineteen-forties mystery—what the French were just beginning to call film noir—edged in darkness and soaked in paranoia. At times, the camera seems nearly sick with emotion as it leads us through the narrative maze. "I saw the camera seeing most things through Hamlet's eyes," Olivier explained, sounding distinctly like Welles in his early Hollywood days, “wandering, or running, through the empty corridors, piercing the vast shadows of Elsinore’s great rooms of state for some joy or the sight of some familiar object.” This visual language tightly binds the play, as does the scene of Hamlet’s funeral procession, which Olivier claimed came to him suddenly (in fact, he lifted it from Barrymore’s production) and gave him “the whole conception of the film.” Glimpsed at the opening, the procession brings the film to a thunderingly romantic end: the Prince’s body, laid on a bier, is carried up a twisting staircase to the turret; we get just a glimpse of his face—upside down as the bier moves past. And as the brass in William Walton’s score begin to shriek, and the cannon boom their salute, the grievous little cortège emerges into the open air and stands in silhouette against a glowing sky.



Welles in his 1952 “Othello,” which won the Palme d’Or at Cannes.

JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION/CORBIS

Welles knew that Olivier was filming “Hamlet” when he began to shoot “Macbeth,” in June. Thanks to the success of “Henry V,” he was able to make a deal with a cowboy-picture studio, Republic Pictures, which was willing to take a chance on Welles’s ability to turn out a “superior product” on a budget so low that, no matter how superior it turned out to be, it could not fail. Like Olivier, Welles adapted the script—cutting Shakespeare’s shortest tragedy to under two hours—and signed on to produce, direct, and star. “Hamlet,” however, took six months to film; Welles shot “Macbeth” in twenty-three days.

If “Hamlet” approaches film noir, “Macbeth” resembles a cheap sci-fi or horror film. The papier-mâché sets were painted to resemble barren rock and to mirror Macbeth’s soul: the metaphysical unity that Welles had felt was lacking in “Henry V.” Welles is a somewhat dazed Macbeth—the murmuring-voice-over trap catches him, too—sitting like a petulant child on his high-chair throne, more Ubu Roi than the Scottish king. Despite the historical setting, Lady Macbeth—a serpentlike performance by Jeanette Nolan—is introduced wearing a forties gown. Reality is not remotely a consideration. But Welles wanted above all to create a world where the witches might be real, and here they are pagan priestesses hurling their spells against a sea of Celtic crosses—a theological battle that he wrested from the text by scavenging lines to produce a whole new character, representing the Church. With equal willfulness, he had the actors speak in a Scottish burr, chiefly to avoid both the British accent that he dismissed as “BBC” and the regional accents of his American cast; it also gave the words a lilting strangeness (“so right,” Welles told Peter Bogdanovich, “for all that gooseflesh and grue”). The result is a film at once embarrassingly bad and undeniably powerful. The viewer may laugh, but nervously: “Macbeth” is unrelenting, one long intensifying shriek.

Welles managed to bring “Macbeth” in on budget and on time. Officials at Republic were thrilled until, as editing began, he ran away. Recalling Houseman’s tales about Welles’s hysteria at the scent of failure, one can only conclude that he was far less thrilled than his B-picture backers with what he had achieved. “Some of the individual scenes are the best things I’ve done,” he told a friend that summer, “but when they are stuck together, the picture may be a complete flop.” Although Welles had already started shooting “Othello,” Republic managed to cajole him into completing the film. In September, 1948, “Macbeth” was proudly entered in the Venice International Film Festival—and immediately withdrawn, when Welles realized that Olivier’s “Hamlet” was in competition, too.

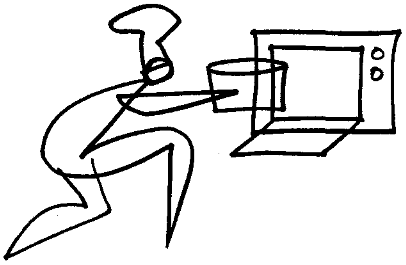
“Welles has failed utterly to live up to the standard set by Laurence Olivier’s ‘Hamlet,’ ” *Newsweek* announced when the films were released, and there was hardly a major journal that saw the comparison any other way. (“Hamlet” had indeed won the Venice prize for best foreign film.) Although several European critics displayed an enthusiasm (even a preference) for Welles’s work, in the English-speaking world he was taken for a bumbler unable to appreciate the Bard; Olivier, now Sir Laurence—he had been knighted during the filming of “Hamlet”—was Shakespeare’s representative on earth. Republic Pictures, its expectations crushed, recalled “Macbeth” for radical reconstruction. By the time Olivier was collecting Oscars for “Hamlet”—Best Picture, Best Actor—Welles had decided to leave America for good.

A dark man’s face is seen very close, and disconcertingly upside down. His body is slowly revealed to be lying on a bier, which is carried from interior gloom into blinding sun. The only sound, a drum like a heartbeat, expands to a grief-stricken chant as a procession of monks following the bier is joined by a second procession—it cuts across the frame much closer to us, its leading churchman as startlingly huge as a saint in a medieval painting—bearing a young woman whose pallor is set off by a black gossamer shroud. The funeral of Othello and Desdemona, unremarked by Shakespeare, winds along windswept battlements for four minutes before Welles launches the story of how they lived and died. A breathtaking tour de force, set to Francesco Lavagnino's "hair-raising" (Welles's word) score, the scene is a free expansion of Olivier's interpolation of the funeral of Hamlet: nowhere else does Welles so clearly throw the gauntlet down. Most remarkable, the lyric intensity of this wordless passage carries through the entire film.

It is true that one comes away from "Othello" heady with the imagery more than with the verse, which may be the primary difference between the films of Welles and Olivier. Welles's Othello is almost as muted as his Macbeth (one suspects him of struggling against his tendency to be a "hambone"), but his restraint acquires nobility beside the prissy Iago of Micheál MacLiammóir and the Venetian angel of a Desdemona played by Suzanne Cloutier, her gold hair strewn with pearls. If these are not virtuoso performances, there is among them not a note of declamation, or a moment's sense of transposed theatre. The faces, the language, the velvety darks of Venetian streets, the wheeling gulls over Cyprus—all merge in a work that seems as independent, in its way, as Verdi's opera, by which Welles was reportedly inspired. But his real inspiration seems to have come from the French directors who had taken the exile in as one of their own. "Othello" often looks so much like a work of the French poetic tradition that one is surprised to hear its characters speaking English: like Cocteau's "Beauty and the Beast," in its fairy-tale air and its black-and-pewter tones; like Marcel Carné's "Children of Paradise," whose art director, Alexander Trauner, Welles had managed to steal away. Trauner based his designs on the sixteenth-century Venetian painter Carpaccio, but Welles contrived to capture not so much the look of the paintings as the immediate, gleaming life from which the painter drew.

It seems a wonder that Welles finished the film at all. He financed it entirely himself, and adapted constantly as he went along. When constructing sets turned out to be too expensive, he filmed in various locations in Italy, Portugal, and Morocco. In one famous instance, when costumes did not arrive, he reset the scene of Roderigo's murder in a Turkish bath. The process took nearly four years—from 1948 to 1952—during which Welles continually interrupted shooting to take on acting roles in other films. Even "The Third Man" was done only to earn the money to resume "Othello." Because the filming was often done out of doors, it was impossible to capture sound, so dubbing—with all its synchronization problems—was required. Actors came and went. The whole extraordinarily flowing film was painstakingly pieced together from shots made years and countries apart. "Roderigo kicks Cassio in Massaga," Welles enjoyed explaining, "and gets punched back in Orgete, a thousand miles away."

He was still editing "Othello" when Olivier, who was making forays into theatrical producing, invited him to direct and/or star in a play in London, in the fall of 1951. Welles chose to do both, in "Othello." This was the first time the men had worked together since 1939, and Welles was cautious, perhaps even intimidated, confiding to his biographer Barbara Leaming, "I wanted to do as much of an English 'Othello' as I could." Olivier by then had played every major Shakespeare hero except Othello, a role he regarded as "pretty well unplayable" and inevitably upstaged by Iago. (Welles could not resist telling Olivier that he should never play the role, since he lacked the requisite bass voice.) Nevertheless, by Welles's admission, Olivier freely advised him on interpretation. And there is some evidence that Welles, departing from his film performance, approached Olivier's eventual accounting of the role: he wore a vain man's big gold earrings, and his dominant effect was of a rising, dangerous rage. Reviews were mostly favorable, despite snide references to Welles's infamous radio broadcast ("some dark monster invading us from Mars") or, worse, to "Citizen Coon." Olivier, however, was unimpressed, feeling that Welles had betrayed his immense gifts through a lack of discipline.



In May, 1952, Welles's film of "Othello" won the Palme d'Or at Cannes. He was now the darling of the French critics, who had first seen "Citizen Kane," like all contemporary American films, only after the war; for them, the thrill of freedom clung especially to Welles's highly personal and expressive style. He found himself the guiding spirit of a new movement, in which the director was credited as the sole author of a film, an "auteur" in the same sense as Sartre or Camus. English critics, however, remained unmoved. "MR. WELLES MURDERS SHAKESPEARE IN THE DARK," read the headline of one London review. In America, where distributors were nervous about even a sixteenth-century interracial romance, the film wasn't released until three years later. Its box-office receipts amounted to forty thousand dollars.

After this crushing failure, things went rapidly downhill, as Welles's weight went wildly up. A modern-dress film of "Julius Caesar" was cancelled before it was begun. He appeared in a mini-version of "King Lear," on American television, in 1953, but the new medium's favorite Shakespearean actor turned out to be Welles's old nemesis Maurice Evans, who still sounded the way Americans thought Shakespeare was supposed to sound. In late 1955, caught in the coils of a bungled film project, "Mr. Arkadin," Welles fled back to America. He was forty years old. He decided that it was time to make good on the promise of an American classical theatre, in New York, beginning with "King Lear." On opening night, in January, 1956, he received an ovation as soon as he stepped onstage, which he claimed unnerved him and ruined his performance. ("I knew I couldn't possibly do justice to that," he explained.) He had already broken one ankle—his weight was approaching three hundred pounds—and before the night was out he injured the other; he played the rest of the run in a wheelchair. The reviews were devastating, and all thoughts of future productions were scotched. He never appeared onstage in this country again.

As for Olivier, the mid-fifties merely settled his crown. In 1954, he agreed to film one of his most celebrated stage roles,

VISITING THE LIBRARY IN A STRANGE CITY

The words reappear, slowly
developing
on a vast unknown
but precise number of pages

as I enter: the great building
empty of visitors
except for me, reading
the minds of the dead—

moving with exaggerated
and slow-motion care,
as when assigned to lead
the blind kid to his classroom

forty years ago,
down rows
between dusty volumes, a light
snow beginning.

—*Franz Wright*

Richard III—the supreme Shakespearean monster, whom he had managed to make wittily ingratiating, with a nose like the Big Bad Wolf and a troublingly sexual charm. As a director, he worried that he had exhausted his ideas, and "Richard III" has none of the shaping conceits of his earlier films, relying instead on a charged theatricality: exaggerated makeup, elaborate costumes, and the pleasure of virtuoso acting in and for itself. The following year, at Stratford-Upon-Avon, he took on "Macbeth" for the first time since his early Old Vic days; before the season opened, half a million ticket orders were received.

Orson Welles was in Las Vegas when, in March, 1956, the film of "Richard III" had its American première. He had moved there with his family—third wife, third daughter—and was at last enjoying a big success, with an act at the Riviera Hotel, in which he mixed magic tricks with recitations from "Julius Caesar" and "King Lear." Under the terms of a unique agreement, "Richard III" opened in movie theatres—in vividly colored wide-screen VistaVision—the same day it appeared on national TV. Tens of millions of people watched the NBC broadcast that Sunday afternoon, more than had seen "Richard III" during all the previous centuries combined. The following month, Welles moved back to Hollywood, where he appeared in an episode of "I Love Lucy." The story revolved around his having agreed to perform his Vegas act for a benefit at Ricky Ricardo's night club. Lucy, of course, wants to perform Shakespeare with him, and she attempts to win him over. "I think you're the greatest Shakespearean actor in the whole world," she gushes. "I think you're better than John Gielgud. I think you're better than Maurice Evans. I think you're better than Sir Ralph Richardson!" To which Welles responds, after a slight pause, "You left out Laurence Olivier." The studio audience howled with laughter.

There is a photograph of the two of them backstage in a Dublin theatre, in 1960. Olivier had come to see Welles's "Chimes at Midnight," a reshaped and mercifully pared-down version of "Five Kings," which retained the essential story of Falstaff and Prince Hal. Neatly correct in a suit and tie, Olivier stands with one arm stiffly draped around Welles's shoulders. Welles, in costume as Falstaff, returns a crinkly grin and gazes into Olivier's eyes, as though seeking something there. In fact, Welles was hoping that "Chimes" would move on to London, and there was little that Olivier could not have made happen if he chose. Instead, Olivier asked Welles to come to London to direct his own first venture into the avant-garde, Ionesco's "Rhinoceros"—although, according to Welles, Olivier did most of the directing, after informing the rest of the cast that Welles had been doing everything wrong, and sending him away, humiliated, a few days before the opening. (Austin Pendleton has written an ingenious play, "Orson's Shadow," about the "Rhinoceros" fiasco.) "He had to destroy me," Welles explained, with an oddly inverted ring of respect. "He doesn't want anybody else up there. He's like Chaplin, you know. He's a real fighting star."

The establishment of Britain's National Theatre was announced in 1962. In an acknowledgment of his near-Churchillian stature, Olivier was named director, and his début as Othello was the big event of the first season. He had trained like a prizefighter to expand his lung power and, working with a voice teacher, had managed to lower his vocal range by nearly an octave. His first appearance as a coal-black African lord caused a wave of shock; his makeup took nearly three hours to apply, and included gentian violet on the inside of his mouth, a pinkish coloring on his palms and the soles of his feet, and drops in his eyes to increase the white sheen. Playing a creature of swaggering vanity, sexuality, and pride, who is quickly reduced to a howling, nearly naked slave, he gave a towering performance that offered something to offend everyone.

A filmed record of the production was made the following summer. Olivier approached the project apprehensively, and was not pleased with the result. (Many have found his performance far too broad; Welles happily claimed that Olivier reminded him of Sammy Davis, Jr.) Most of all, Olivier regretted that a "full-blown Shakespeare film" could not be made, because there was no money to make it. Despite "Richard III" 's phenomenal première—or precisely because of the coup of the television showing—the film had failed at the box office, not even making back its costs. As a result, the gates thrown open by "Henry V" were closed; no one would take a chance on Shakespeare, not even with Olivier. He had already tried to raise money to film "Macbeth," for which he had plenty of ideas, as his best biographer, Anthony Holden, has pointed out. (For one, it would have been shot in Scotland with—hats off to Welles—Scottish accents.) But Olivier did not have Welles's Falstaffian stomach for begging, tricks, and impoverished stumbling through. "Richard III" was the last "full-blown Shakespeare film" that he directed or appeared in.

No one ever accused Olivier of playing himself, or presumed even to know who that person was. ("Scratch an actor," Olivier said, "and underneath you will find another actor.") Range and continual change were all. The only roles in which he displayed no interest were the morbidly unheroic Richard II, who was temperamentally the property of Gielgud, and Falstaff—whom Welles had been drawn to for decades, even before the tragic clown took him over body and soul. In 1964, Welles talked a Spanish producer into financing "Chimes at Midnight," a movie so pressingly personal that it hardly seems surprising when Jeanne Moreau, playing Doll Tearsheet, blithely addresses Welles's Falstaff as "Orson." (This is what a French accent does to the Shakespearean epithet "whoreson.") The result was sometimes as fractured as the process of getting the film made. Welles hired Gielgud to play the imperiously cold Henry IV, but he could pay him only for two weeks of work, and used a double for the rest; at times, all the major actors (except Welles) were doubles, and there were the usual problems with dubbing and synching. But Welles managed to impart an astoundingly rich physical texture to every scene: the wintry air, the glow of a fire in Justice Shallow's hut, the fullness of the surrounding life appear so natural—the showy camerawork of his youth is mostly gone—that he seems merely to have photographed a world miraculously found. Yet we know how exactingly he built it, burning incense even out of doors to diffuse the light. Although one would hardly guess it from the look of the two films, Welles's goal was not so different from Olivier's in "Henry V." "It mustn't seem *perfectly* real," he warned. "It doesn't mean anything unless it makes poetry possible."

In other ways, Welles's late masterpiece is the deliberate reverse of "Henry V." The divergence is clearest in the set-piece battle of Shrewsbury, where Henry IV consolidates his powers, and Prince Hal proves himself his royal son. Although Welles allows us the marvellous sight of knights lowered out of trees onto their horses, the romance of chivalry immediately gives way to barbarism: swinging maces, shrieks of pain, the clang of armor and the squish of mud as corpses pile high, and even the horses fall to agonized deaths—less Agincourt than Guernica. The soul-divided Hal, on succeeding to the throne as Henry V, promptly follows his father's advice to "busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels," and declares war on France. (When Keith Baxter, who plays Hal with unforced charm, told Welles that he wanted to go on to play "Henry V," Welles responded, "Why would you want to do that? He's a most awful shit.") Opposed to all this power-mongering and death stands (or waddles) Falstaff. Welles is at his best when, wearing a saucepan crown, he mocks the old King—wickedly imitating Gielgud's fluty tremolo—and when, at Hal's coronation, he kneels before his beloved boy's rebuke: "I know thee not, old man." Welles expands on the plays to let us know, through the pain in the young King's eyes, that he understands what he is giving up; the look that Welles returns, mixing paternal pride and stunned sorrow, makes this exchange of glances one of Shakespeare's greatest moments, even if Shakespeare never wrote it.

In America about this time, the French veneration of Welles was finally having an impact. In 1961, the Museum of Modern Art had a major Welles retrospective, curated by Peter Bogdanovich. The following year, the critic Andrew Sarris introduced the "auteur theory" to these shores, and Welles was securely installed in the pantheon of the new academic discipline of film. None of which meant that "Chimes at Midnight" made any money—or even that anyone got to see it. It opened and closed in New York almost simultaneously, in 1967, after the *Times* complained that the soundtrack was incomprehensible. Although commercial failure seemed only to increase Welles's highbrow status, when asked to comment on "the art of cinema" he confessed that "I'd rather be caught without my pants in the middle of Times Square."

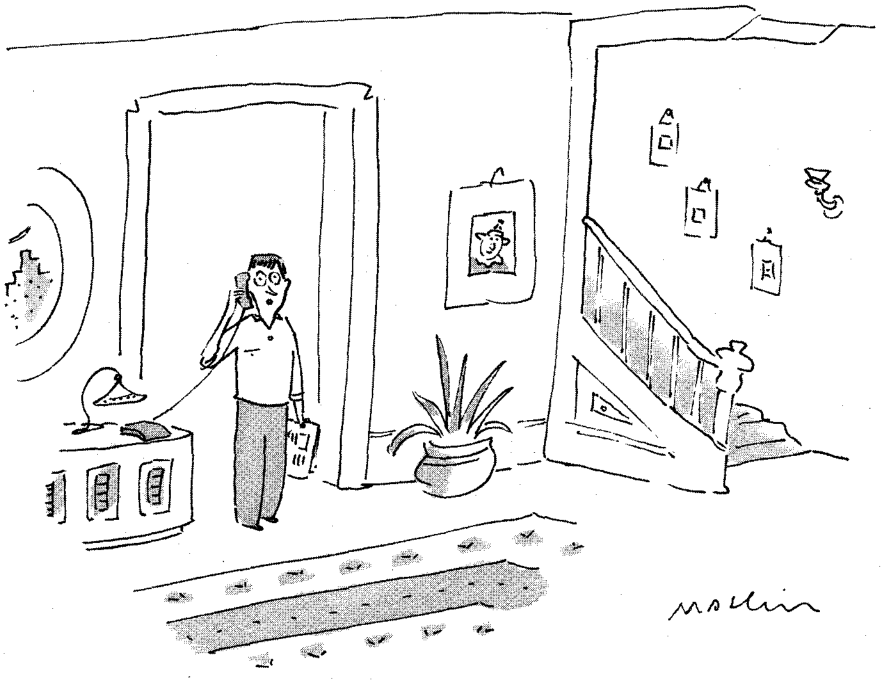
Olivier was by now a paterfamilias, both to the National Theatre—working tirelessly as actor and administrator—and to his new wife, Joan Plowright, and their young children. But, as he approached his sixties, his body seemed to give way. Flu, prostate cancer, and pneumonia struck him in succession; he suffered from a rare and often agonizing muscle disease for the last fifteen years of his life. And yet it is possible that more people saw him act in these years than

"My granddaughter wants me to stop blowing the tops off mountains."

ever before, owing to the film and television roles that he took on, ostensibly because he needed the money for his family, but also because the work kept him alive. In 1983, at seventy-five, lacking the strength to appear onstage, he played King Lear in a television production. Pale and gaunt—Cordelia, dead in his arms, had to be suspended on wires—he was at once ethereal and majestic, and he seemed to feel that at last he was playing himself: "When you get to my age, you *are* Lear, in every nerve of your body." He managed to complete two versions of his memoirs; looking back on the success of "Henry V," the first thing he recalled was that some people had said it was "the best first film since 'Citizen Kane.' "

Olivier endured long past expectations, and when he died, in 1989, the memorial service, at Westminster Abbey, was fit for one of the kings he had played. In a grand processional, Paul Scofield bore a silver model of the National Theatre, Derek Jacobi the crown Olivier had worn as Richard III, and Dorothy Tutin the crown he had worn as Lear. The most revered theatrical relic, though, was a sword that had belonged to Edmund Kean. It had been passed down through generations of actors, and the unfailingly generous and admiring Gielgud had given it to Olivier years before. Olivier, however, had insisted that it stop with him. The high point of the ceremony was Olivier's own voice resounding in the battle speech from "Henry V." He was buried in the abbey very near the monarch himself.

But in the art of acting yesterday's realism is today's mannerism. Just as Olivier had rebelled against Gielgud's way of "singing" verse, Kenneth Branagh has rebelled against the "oratorical, rhetorical style" of Olivier's Henry V and his "self-conscious" Hamlet, and has remade Shakespeare for another era—brightly polished and wholly conventional. More daring films, such as Baz Luhrmann's "Romeo + Juliet" and Michael Almereyda's "Hamlet," have turned the disjunction between Elizabethan speech and the modern age into the central ironic point: Denmark is the name of a corporation; ecstasy is a drug. This new method of meeting the same old goals has proved a huge success with an audience that no longer expects its world—on or off the screen—to be coherent.



"She's out stimulating the economy—can I take a message?"

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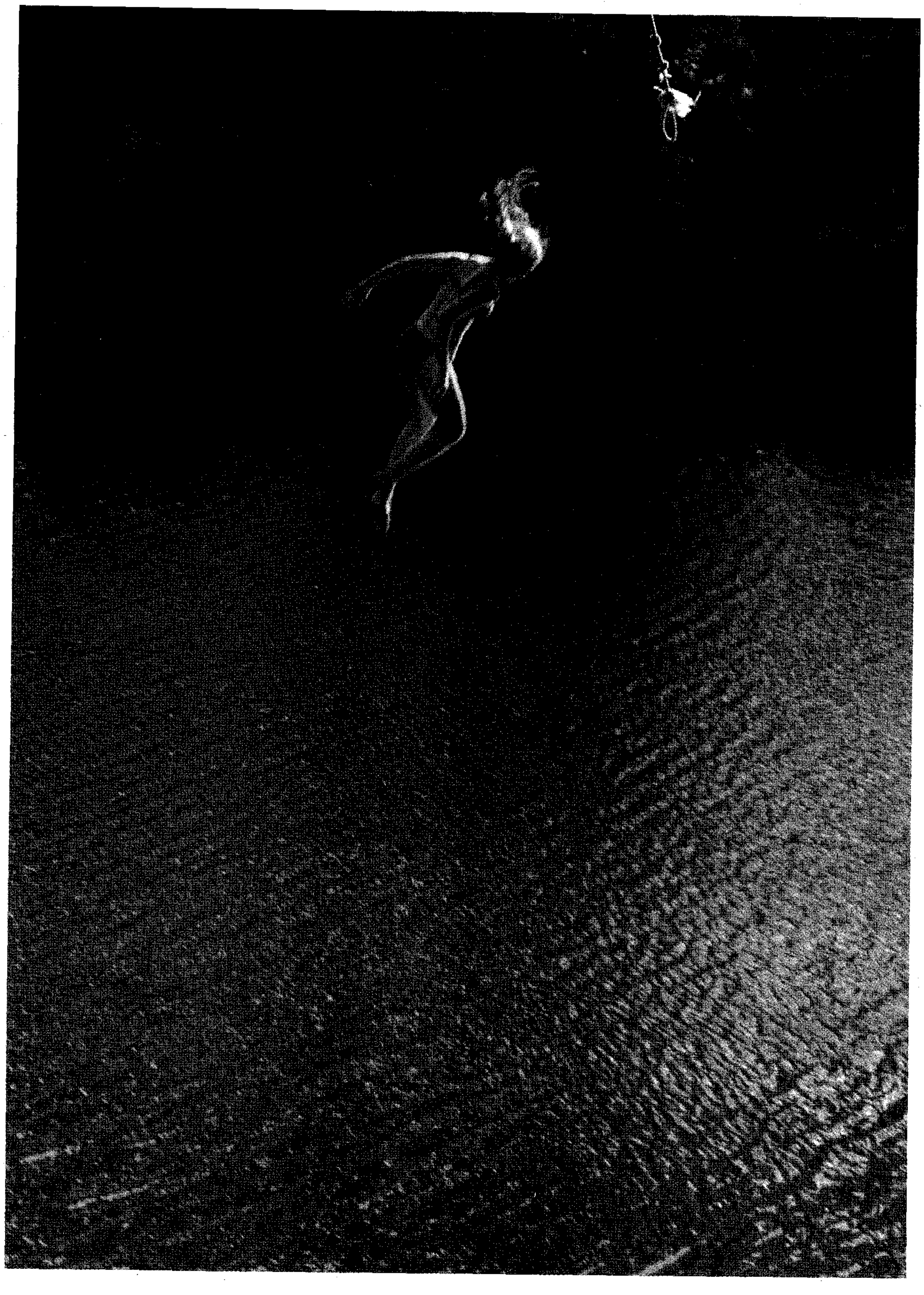
The rise of this looser aesthetic has been a boon to Welles's reputation. In the nineteen-eighties, "Macbeth" was restored to his original version, and in the following decade "Othello" was restored to a version superior to the original, in terms of sound—just when many English-speaking critics were coming around to the idea that technical flaws were part of his works' "raffish" charm. Yet, while books and seminars on Welles today abound ad nauseam, the audience for his Shakespeare trilogy remains small. Although "Macbeth" and "Othello" are available on DVD, neither has received the deluxe treatment awarded to Olivier's Shakespeare films, to "Citizen Kane," or, for that matter, to Welles's unfinished botch of a film, "Mr. Arkadin." "Chimes at Midnight," caught in a legal wrangle, has not been shown theatrically in this country since its initial failure, nor has it been released here on DVD. In recent years, Roger Ebert has campaigned for its release ("How can it be that there is an Orson Welles masterpiece that remains all but unseen?"), and scenes have started showing up on YouTube, which may help bring it back to light at last. Welles, who considered "Chimes" his finest work—"If I wanted to get into heaven on the basis of one movie, that's the one I would offer up"—ruefully told of a Hollywood producer who, during Welles's later years, inquired if he had ever thought of playing Falstaff.

By then, he was famous for being grotesquely fat, for appearing on talk shows, for selling cheap wine on TV. But he was famous most of all as the man who had got everything he wanted, and then—as a reporter says of Charles Foster Kane—lost it. The more often "Citizen Kane" showed up on lists as the best movie ever made, the steeper his descent appeared. By now, Welles's monumental failure is as ingrained in the notion of who he was as the sound of his voice, even though "Othello" and "Chimes at Midnight" are more humanly rich achievements than "Kane," and among the greatest Shakespeare movies ever made. Welles admitted to "thousands" of regrets, but he did not offer blame for the way things turned out: he did not care to look back at all. The real masterpiece was always the movie waiting to be made. Like Olivier, Welles kept on working to the end. He died of a heart attack, at seventy, in 1985, apparently in his sleep. He was found the next morning with a typewriter balanced on his belly. He had been working on the script for his latest project, a video version of "Julius Caesar" in which he was to play every role. His plans for filming "King Lear" were also well under way. ♦

FICTION

OR ELSE

BY ANTONYA NELSON



"My family owns a house in Telluride" was his favorite, most useful line. He used it on a particular kind of girl or woman, somebody with whom he could not foresee a future, somebody who he knew would one day perceive him truly, with X-ray eyes, and move on. In the meantime, he could take her for a long weekend to Telluride.

She would be impressed by the modesty of the place. "It really is a shack," he would insist during the drive from Arizona, the desert falling away mile by mile, shrubbery and rocks transforming subtly from prickly saguaro and desiccated scrub oak to piñon, then aspen and spruce, an escalation of markers by which David had measured his own evolution, from nagging anticipation to delighted arrival, for more than twenty-five years. Not much had changed on that journey, neither for David nor in the world around him. Yes, traffic in Tucson was worse now; sure, the R.V. drivers had discovered Show Low; sadly, a piece of the petrified forest was on fire; and some gaudy casino had suddenly landed on the vast moonscape near the Navajo Nation. In Cortez, you had to detour through an endless engineering endeavor meant to straighten out the highway, which used to be sexy 666 but had been newly, inoffensively renumbered. And could it be trout farming below the dam at Dolores—square plastic-lined pools in which writhing motion could be detected, as if someone were boiling a great stew of fish rather than breeding them? But the most important things remained faithfully themselves, and David watched them pass as if they were winking at him, confirming their talismanlike role in his triumphant trajectory.

"You're giddy," his current companion noted, in her peculiarly deep voice. When would this voice cease surprising David? On the phone you could easily mistake it for a man's voice. Its owner had not seen him this way before, unguardedly enthusiastic, and he knew that joy, like a child's smile, made him appealing, and also somehow vulnerable. If she chose to, she could hold his joy, his childishness, in contempt. "Very cute," she said, opening both windows on her side of the car so that she could smoke. Meanwhile, he held tight to the wheel and adhered to the speed limit, because he wanted nothing to interfere with his momentum, no rules to be broken, no winking signposts missed. Then they were at the penultimate turn, the box canyon just ahead, and the little town corralled within, its waterfall tumbling reliably at the precise center of the backdrop, a landscape painting by a sentimental artist.

SANDRA GNANDT, "UNTITLED" (2001)

"Telluride," he announced in a tone that said *ta-da!* "The most beautiful place I've ever been."

"But," she exhaled, teasing, "where have you been?"

And he was too drunk with pleasure to do anything but laugh.

He narrated the noteworthy sites as they rolled past, those milestones of adolescence and young adulthood: the former train station, where he'd watched, one night in the late seventies, as the local firemen, drunk, set flame to an outbuilding and then extinguished it, which was their tradition. Only later did they discover that one of their volunteers had suffered heart failure in the hubbub. This man was the father of one of the boys who were watching, rolling their eyes at the antics of their elders, which were not so different from the antics of the youngsters crowded around a furtive campfire smoking cigarettes, on what was then the rugged other side of the river.

"That's where we used to hang out on Friday and Saturday nights," David told his passenger, pointing at the marble steps of a former bank, its stately window now cluttered with sunglasses. "Waiting to see where the party was. And that's the bar that never carded, and up there is the historical museum, which we knew how to break into."

"Why?"

He left off his wistful recitation to study her. " 'Why?' "

"Yeah. Why break into a museum? I mean, did you steal stuff?"

"No." Well, yes. But not important stuff.

Danielle, he considered, was perhaps different from the other women he'd brought here. She was older, for one thing, forty-two to his thirty-nine. Had she outgrown not only adolescent rebellion but the memory of its allure? Maybe. Once, in the middle of making love, he'd asked her why she'd closed her eyes. "I'm pretending you're someone else," she said. David had ceased motion, no idea what to say. That was what was wrong with him—he was often left speechless, unsure whether he had a right to indignation or hurt feelings, unsure how exactly a person was entitled to react. "Who?" he'd finally asked. "My last boyfriend," she told him, slipping away, pulling a pillow into an embrace between them. "He was a married man, and a lot older than me. He died a couple of years ago, of a heart condition. I don't think of him the whole time—hardly ever, actually. I just was right then, when you asked." She stared at David frankly, the pillow still clutched in her arms.

"And there's the house," David said now, making the turn that led up to the little home he loved more than any other place in the world.

"The house that caulk built," the family fondly called it. Jack Hart had purchased this property forty years earlier, upon the birth of his first child, Priscilla. They'd been campers, the Harts, until Pris was born. Then Mrs. Hart had put her foot down; she said so whenever the story was told. "No infants in tents! No diapers in the wilderness!" A small house was found, there in the glorious dying mining town, on a hill, with views that were shockingly symphonic from the crooked front porch. The Harts had lived by the academic calendar; every summer, they'd fled the heat of Tucson for a three-month respite in this tiny miners' den, with its walls made of something called beaverboard sagging into the ground, atop a fading community of similar structures, occupied or abandoned by drunken miners and eccentric bar owners, Masons, shopkeepers—future ghosts. "The salt of the earth," Dr. Hart would extoll. He taught American Studies; his interests were wider and perhaps more catholic than those of many of his ivory-tower cohorts. He found his summer town unpretentious, gritty, endearing. He became an Elk; he agreed to be deputized for the annual invasion of the Hell's Angels on the Fourth of July. He invited his friends to visit, and his offspring did the same. The house was filled with impromptu dinner parties, bridge games, storytelling sessions over the sticky kitchen table, on which there always sat a large bottle of red wine.

At the house—which was now wedged, like a cartoon house, between big bullying mansions on either side—David parked. The air was bracing; the lack of oxygen meant that your breath was literally taken away. Around him, the peaks rose in their familiar battleship formation, proximate and daunting. They seemed poised to move, shift on their haunches, and shrug the tiny toy town aside. It was May, and they were still snow-covered; the aspens wore their nascent green, and on the streets below there was a resonant silence. The off season. A collective reverent rest between tourist onslaughts.

Up the crumbling concrete steps David led Danielle; the door would be locked, the key long ago lost, he told her, but the west living-room window could be unlatched. It squealed when he yanked it up; to prop it open, he used the tubular cast-iron counterweight that sat, year after year, in a cluster of rusty or glass objects found on hikes and scavenging adventures and brought home as porch décor. Having crawled through the window, David took a moment to breathe in the peculiar scent of the house: coal dust, which still filled the inner walls and pooled at the base of the spongy panelling; stale sunlight, captured through the wavering glass of the west windows; the very faint odor of natural gas, from a leak that could never be located; and the simply unique smell of the Hart family itself. Home.

Then he went to the front door, on the other side of which waited Danielle, who was shivering, staring cross-eyed at the door handle rather than at the monstrous mountains around her. The elevation was nearly nine thousand feet; from bake-blasted Tucson, you had to bring sweaters and woollen socks as an act of faith. It was cold up here. At night, the stars devastated the clear, clear sky.

David Chalmers was a liar by nature and, now, by long habit. He lied when it wasn't necessary, when it wasn't even advantageous. He lied to amuse himself, to excuse himself, to camouflage himself. The Harts were not his family. He had been an honorary member, once upon a time, and then he had been banished, albeit gently.

He had found the family through Priscilla, the eldest daughter, who, at age nine, had insisted that he was the friend she wished to bring with her for the summer visit. Priscilla was a tomboy then, and David was her partner in crime. In Tucson, they were prohibited from being in the same classroom at Sam Hughes Elementary. In Telluride, they'd occupied the upstairs front bedroom, with its cracked-window view of town and of the bats that dipped all night long at the green streetlight outside. Late, they'd tiptoe through the back bedroom, where Priscilla's little sisters slept, and exit through the window there, onto the hillside and into the night. For five summers, she'd invited him. And then they were fourteen, and the invitation did not come.

"What happened to your girlfriend?" his father had asked that fateful June, smirking behind his beer and sunglasses. "Have yourself a lovers' spat?" David had no desire or even ability to explain. It was the exact opposite of what his father was suggesting—not a lovers' spat but the taint of loverly possibility. Pris had never been his girlfriend. Until that summer, she hadn't been a *girl*. And now suddenly she was, and she'd invited another girl to accompany her.

David spent the summer daydreaming and imagining himself there, wondering what project Dr. Hart was working on this year.

Dr. Hart had always enjoyed having David around, and he had listened with unskeptical, uncritical attention to whatever Dr. Hart taught him. He'd memorized the names of the plants, the difference between flower and weed; he'd read whatever novel Dr. Hart handed him, reporting back on his confused progress, scandalized, mystified, ashamed; he'd learned to drive on the dirt roads of Telluride, while his own parents were busy eviscerating each other back home, unable to fathom what it was that the Harts liked about him, resenting his ability to escape Tucson for weeks at a time while they were forced to remain, their jobs not ones that permitted long holidays, their friends not likely to have summer homes in the mountains, their son a complicating factor in their shared wish to part ways. David had only reluctantly introduced them to the Harts, hustling the conversation along as he fetched his duffelbag on the morning of the first departure. He'd been highly aware of the way Dr. Hart took in his living room, the giant television, the absence of books or art, and his mother's collection of china dolls, her pantheon, standing rigid on their perches, staring at him with their ice-cold eyes.

Meanwhile, his mother had studied Mrs. Hart, glaring at her tall thinness, her long hair falling in a braid down her back, the easy smile on her tanned face. Mrs. Hart was a potter; her hands were tools, unbeautiful, clay beneath her nails, calluses on her palms. She set her own schedule and followed art fairs around the Southwest. Her three daughters blinked, unafraid, beside her, Priscilla, Violet, Lydia. Their hair was tangled, their knees dirty; the older two already read above grade level and sassed the teachers, and so would the youngest, when it was her turn. They were occasionally kept home "to play in the dirt," Mrs. Hart said. "Just in case they start getting infected by the catty crowd. You know how girls can be," she said to David's mother.

"No," she replied. "I just have David." *Just*. And as if she'd never been a girl herself. As if she'd been born the hag she was now, lumpen and unhappy, suspicious of the life style of her neighbors those hippie Harts. She and her husband let David go because they had no better options for his summers and expected the worst of him: delinquency, slovenliness, eventual arrest. They didn't provide spending money: if the Harts wanted him, they could have him, but his parents would never regard it as a favor to them.

From then on, Mrs. Hart treated David with a small degree of pity, which he accepted the way any rescued creature would. He was not proud, he knew that. She kissed him good night as she kissed her girls, and tucked them all in upstairs, where the air was stuffy and warm, the pitched ceiling directly overhead, decorated with their childish art work, naughtiness and eloquence crisscrossed by webs and spiders, which the Harts never killed, an old record of folk songs spinning on the player set before the open doors of the two bedrooms, the girls singing along to the shocking lyrics. In the morning, Mrs. Hart would ask how they'd slept and serve them pancakes studded with berries; David hadn't known that pancakes could come from anything but a box, or that syrup from its maple source ran thin and tart, nothing like the gluey stuff he got at home.

Then they were set free, out the front door to run wild in the empty town. Down to the river, out to the mine, up the hills, into the few businesses that lined Main, where all the shopkeepers knew their names. David pretended to be the girls' brother. He wished he were with all his heart. At night they played kick the can with the local children, hiding behind sheds and burn barrels. When the curfew siren sounded, they'd head home and spend an hour or two riding the propane tank in the side yard while the air cooled around them.

For five years, the weeks he spent in Telluride stood for David as an annual pinnacle, time that he anticipated and then consumed. Those summers were when David felt most fully himself, trotting alongside Priscilla down the rocky streets, climbing at midnight up the slender path beside the stream to a large flat stone that they considered their own, reclining there shoulder to shoulder, talking without thinking as stars fell overhead. Priscilla encouraged frankness in him; perhaps she encouraged it in everyone. He hadn't spoken without forethought since his early days as a liar. And he hadn't done it since.

David pulled the cord for the kitchen light, a foreign familiar coin cool in his palm, beneath which sat the house's modest hub, the table. Here was where he'd learned the rules of bridge, Mrs. Hart always recognizing his anxiety just before he made a fatal error in play. Here was where, after a morning of painting or plumbing or weeding or roofing, he'd joined Dr. Hart for lunch, sandwiches on bread made by Mrs. Hart, soggy combinations that David's mother would never have dreamed up, and that his father wouldn't have tolerated. Hummus. Shredded carrot. Basil leaves. What the Hart family called "stinky-feet cheese." The beer that the Harts would allow him to sip from time to time. And afterward the afternoon, a warm haze, a certain kind of clicking bug hopping drunkenly through the air. . . . So strong was his sense of the past, so deep was his desire to have it restored that David for a moment forgot whom he'd come with today. Danielle. She was asking in her hoarse voice about the bathroom, about making a fire, about what they might do for dinner, which she called "chow." David immediately set to work with the necessary homecoming moves: plugging in the refrigerator, pulling sheets from the cupboards, running the water long enough to clear rust from the lines.

"This is a cozy room," Danielle said, after she emerged from the bathroom, the toilet gurgling behind her. She stood at the door to Dr. and Mrs. Hart's bedroom.

"My room's upstairs," David said. He had never yet spent a night on the adult Harts' bed. He was willing to break into their home, but he was superstitious about sleeping where they had slept, having sex where they had had sex. "The view is better up there," he said, which was certainly true now that the mansion next door had blocked any kind of view or light from the downstairs rooms.

He and Danielle went up together, single file on the steep, noisy stairs. In the front bedroom, where he'd spent five summers with Priscilla, and then one, in secret, with teen-age Lydia, he sat on the edge of the bed and creaked open the window. Cool air poured in like water. The moon was rising over the mountains, aglow there opposite the lingering light of the setting sun.

"Once I found a bat hanging in here," David said, "before we put up screens." This story wasn't his but Priscilla's. She'd screamed, the black thing attached to her wall like a leather glove.

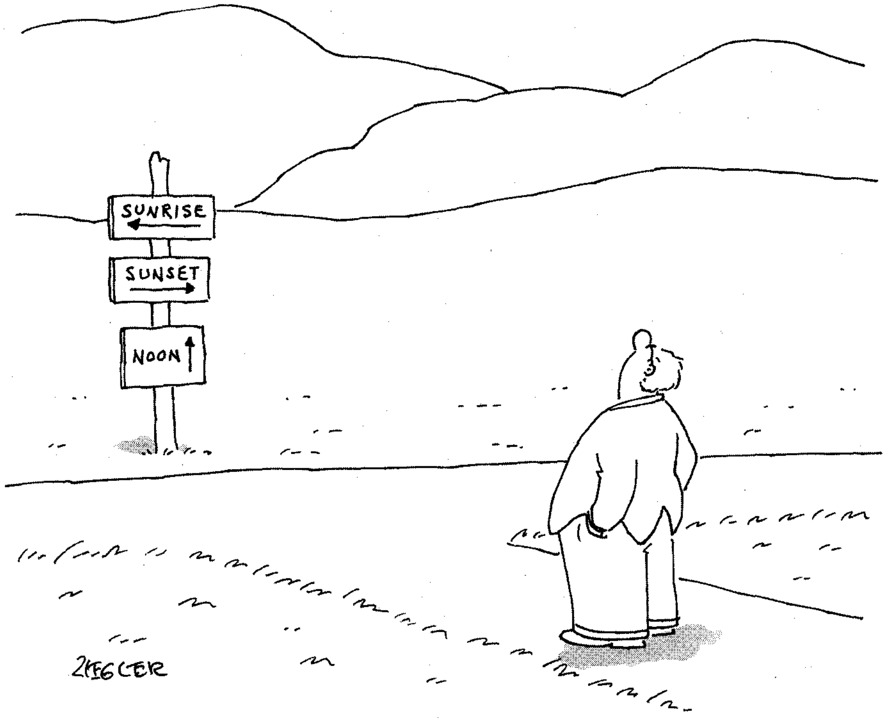
"It's incredible," Danielle said, blinking as her face encountered a spiderweb. "Smart investment, buying this back when."

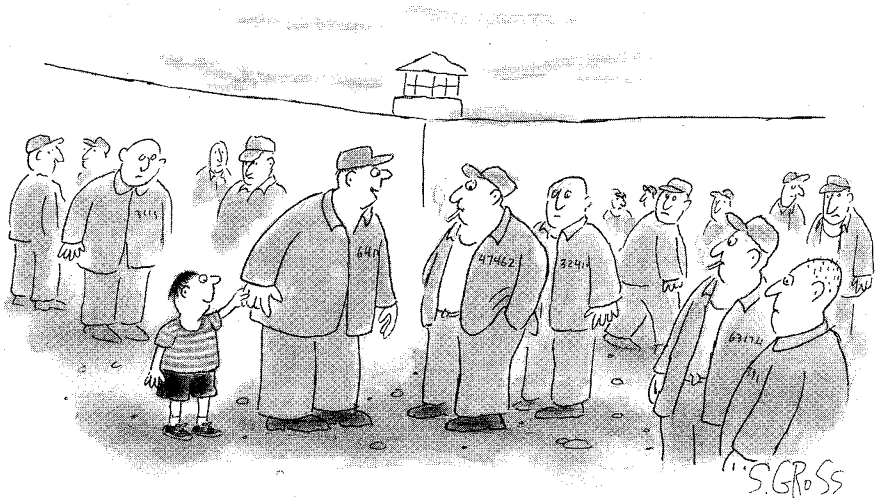
"It wasn't an investment," David said, bristling as he always did when this dull observation was made. "They didn't buy it to make a profit."

"Yeah, O.K., but most people wouldn't have hung on to it. Most people would have cashed in." And then, backing up, she asked, " 'They'?"

"Before I was around," he said.

Dr. Hart had allowed David the use of the house one winter when David had tried to move to Telluride. He'd failed at college, been refused at both his mother's and his father's now separate homes, where they lived with their newly constituted second families, the fleet of step-siblings he scorned. He had found a job with the Telluride transit company, driving off three days a week in a truck that he could barely control, returning the next day with the goods he'd accumulated down in the larger towns: film reels, liquor, coal, hardware, groceries. He was proud of the job—without him, Telluride might not function. He had felt like a legitimate local for the three months that this idyl-





"Instead of just doing time, I decided it could be quality time."

• •

lic situation stuttered along. Then, in November, he crashed, rolled off the hillside on black ice, a delivery of beer and lumber spilled four hundred feet, and that was the end of his reign as town hero. The men who worked at the gravel quarry at the bottom of the hill made off with the spoils; David could only crawl from the cab and shout ineffectually, clutching his broken arm, gasping around bruised lungs, "Stop, thief!" Although he was not paying rent, he had no money for utilities or food or fun. He'd had to return abjectly to Tucson, gas for his own vehicle siphoned with a section of garden hose from a car parked on the street. He hadn't known how to leave a house in the winter; the pipes froze and burst, and a brood of skunks moved in under the floor. When the Harts returned, as they always did, on June 1st, they'd had to stay in a hotel for a few days while the plumbing was replaced and the vermin evicted. David also came to understand that he hadn't been particularly tidy as a tenant, either. "I don't blame you," Dr. Hart assured him. "But I wouldn't bring any of this up with Judy or the girls." With horror, David remembered the pornography he must have left under the upstairs bed. Who had discovered that?

Beside him, Danielle sneezed, five loud times in a row. "I may be allergic to your house," she said. "And don't you ever bless anybody when they sneeze?" As she stepped cautiously, duck-footed, down the steps ahead of him, David had an ugly temptation to plant his foot squarely between her shoulders and deliver a powerful kick.

"Why's your room painted purple?" she was asking. "You some kinda gaylord?"

He'd known the Harts' schedule so well that he was able to engineer a pity pickup one season. They always arrived on the first of June; he'd positioned himself as a hitchhiker on the highway just east of Rico, thirty miles south of Telluride. This, he felt, would permit neither too much nor too little time with the family.

He envisioned their drive as he made his own journey. He had hitched from Tucson days earlier, accepting a long, lucky ride on a band bus with a bluegrass group booked at a bar in Telluride. After begging off at Rico, he'd spent two nights camping on Scotch Creek. It had snowed both nights; his small bivouac sack was frozen every morning as he hatched himself from it. By the time the Harts' white van appeared, David had been offered a half-dozen rides; if the Harts had driven by without stopping, he might have later sought them out for revenge, torched their little piece of Paradise. But they pulled over, as he'd trusted they would, and he managed to hide his exhausted near-hypothermia long enough to pretend utter astonishment at this coincidence. This was two years after his stint as a Telluride transit driver; he claimed he had a job waiting for him, a place to crash, friends looking forward to his arrival.

Lydia and her best friend were along with the parents that year. The other Hart girls were coming later; they had jobs, boyfriends, classes. Only Lydia was still fixed in the family routine. She would be a high-school senior in the fall; her best friend was a dark beauty who greeted David with an automatic seductive move of her knees, making room for him and his damp belongings. Swinging himself into the vehicle, he witnessed an exchanged glance between the Hart parents; he wished that he could somehow convince them that he was worth admitting back into the warm circle of their family. Prodigal? Wasn't that a role he might claim?

"Pris is getting married," Lydia informed him. "At the house. Me and Violet are maids of honor."

"Violet and I," Mrs. Hart said.

"Wow," David said, trying to hide his hurt feelings. Nobody had notified him. And now nobody was inviting him. A pregnant pause filled more than a few miles. The teen-age beauty allowed her thigh to rest against David's, although all he could think of was Priscilla, his old best friend. When they dropped him at the bakery, he immediately began devising some way to become integral to the wedding. Lawn boy? Caterer? He had until the summer solstice to figure it out.

The friend, because girls were cutthroat, would be the key, leading Lydia to sneak him into the house, through that same back window, and into her bed, in the purple room that had once been Pris's, in order to claim victory in having seduced him. Twenty-four to her seventeen, he had closed his eyes during sex, an apology running through his mind like a prayer. For a couple of weeks, he had lived upstairs without the Hart parents' knowledge, like a stray cat, padding softly across the floor, climbing in and out of the back window, eating the food that Lydia and her friend brought for him, crawling into bed beside Lydia, and lying when he said that he'd always liked her best.

In the morning, David's eyes flew open. He'd heard the west window screech downstairs. He looked to the pillow next to him, where he expected to find Danielle, snoring mannishly away, but she was gone. Maybe she was climbing out of the house, done with him.

But before he could pull on pants he heard the women meet, the vague scream of surprise on either side, the confrontation. This was the backdrop to his swift calculations—through the upstairs window he would go, down to the car, out of town. But wait: no key! Then another flashing plan, the one story that would convince both women of his innocence. Palms flattening his hair, he wondered which sister it was, hoping for Lydia, the naughtiest Hart, the spoiled baby with whom he'd had shaming sex. He arrived at the bottom of the stairs just as she was opening the door to the kitchen: Violet.

"David! What the *hell*? I wondered whose car that was, with Arizona plates."

He moved to embrace her, which would normally have been acceptable to placid Violet, except that she seemed somehow armored, wearing a backpack and carrying a shoebox.

"You're early," David chose to say, hoping that bluster might cover his trespass long enough to hustle Danielle out of earshot. "You're not usually here till June 1st. This is Danielle, but I guess you met." Meanwhile, he made a whirl of himself, filling the kettle, lighting the gas. "I told your dad I was coming, but maybe he forgot to mention it?"

Violet didn't respond for a moment. She wasn't as fast on her feet as her sisters. Finally, she said, "When did you tell Dad?"

"Maybe a month ago?"

Violet turned to Danielle. "What's your name again?"

"Danielle. Danielle Graham."

"I'm Violet, and this is my family's house. Welcome," she added, looking down at Danielle's long bare legs under her nightshirt.

"Coffee?" David asked, having the absurd thought that this might not end badly, that Violet might allow him to escape utter humiliation.

"Sure," Violet said. "I don't know why I decided to drive all night."

"Lotta wildlife on the road?" David asked, fussing with filters, cups, potholders, avoiding Danielle's curious expression. Unlike other women, Danielle had a patient, observing personality. She was a nurse, and she didn't panic, not at the arrival of an emergency. She had seen them all. Would that get him off the hook today? Or more fully snag him?

"I almost hit a dozen deer," Violet said. "I was starting to think it was the same one, following me, throwing itself out in the road as a joke." She set the shoebox on the table, shrugged out of the pack, then pulled her knitted duster around her and fell, sighing, into a chair. As the middle child, she'd been accustomed to being left out. She was neither the oldest nor the youngest, nor was she a boy, which would have been a Hart novelty. Perhaps she felt redundant. David had been Pris's friend, not hers. Violet had read books; sometimes she'd grown bored and tattled. David had always thought her the dud Hart, the least necessary of the bunch. She had asthma, and a wandering eye, her left, that nudged toward her skull. Because of these imperfections, she'd always seemed approachable; she'd seemed to be a *nice* person even if she wasn't actually a nice person. People were misled by the wandering eye, as if her attention or intelligence or humanity also wandered, as if she had only to be half attended to.

Violet let David serve her coffee. Via chitchat, she and Danielle had discovered that they were members of the same twenty-four-hour gym in Tucson, although Violet, lazy, rarely used the place, and Danielle's routine there was odd, given her shifts at the hospital.

"I'm here to prepare for Lydia's wedding," Violet said to David. "Mom and Pris and Lyd are coming tomorrow, and then Pris's husband and kids the day after, with the fiancé."

David had seated himself at the head of the table, aware suddenly that his feet were bare and frozen, that he ought to have started a fire, that Violet hadn't mentioned her father's arrival time, that he was looking at the box she had set on the table, and that the label on it was from a mortuary. The wedding would take place in a week, Violet was saying, but before then, before the men and children arrived, the women were going to scatter Dr. Hart's ashes.

"What?"

"Dad died," Violet said, adding, almost apologetically, "last December. Pancreatic cancer. It was very unexpected." She was studying her coffee cup, which was one that her mother had thrown, years earlier; almost all the cups and plates and bowls and trivets were of Mrs. Hart's making, mismatched seconds that she hadn't been able to sell. "Christmas was awful," Violet said, "but I think we're all getting used to it now. We thought we'd take him up to Blue Lake. He always said that was his favorite spot. Although I'm not sure that Mom can make it up there anymore, with her arthritis. She's a potter," she explained to Danielle. "So it's really especially cruel for her to have arthritis."

David stared at the white box. It could have held shoes, or pastries, paper. He felt as if he were physically repulsing the news of its true contents, the way one magnet repulses another. The box on the table, the table in the house, the house in the town, the town in the canyon. And the man, in the box. David was dizzy. "I didn't know. Why didn't you tell me?" he said finally, interrupting an exchange the women were having. Danielle, he'd overheard, learning it for the first time, was an orphan.

Violet performed her unique blink, one eye closing just before the other. "His obituary ran in the paper," she said at last.

They should have notified him, he thought. He should have been personally told. How was it that they could not understand his affection for them all, his need especially for Dr. Hart?

Violet said, gently, "I think you probably ought to get out of here today. I don't really care that you're here, but it's not going to be cool with Mom or Pris."

He never got away with anything, he thought. If it wasn't an officer of the law pulling him over, it was a ticket in the mail, the indisputable evidence of his vehicle flying past a camera at many miles over the speed limit. What such a person might eventually ask himself was why he felt a need to break the rules, tell lies, have things to get away with. Why couldn't he, in some definitive way, exhaust or outgrow his childish defiance?

Upstairs, as they bundled their belongings back into their bags, David preëmpted what he believed would be Danielle's outrage by saying, "Don't say anything, O.K.? Just don't say a fucking word." She was his responsibility, witness to his humiliation, a woman with a horsy face—big square teeth, oversized jaw, hair that she tossed like a mane—five hundred miles from Tucson, where she belonged. Now she was stripping the bed, methodically removing what they’d just last night spread out together.

“We have to wash these,” she said. “It’s the least.”

Downstairs, she assured Violet that she would return the sheets by noon, leave them on the front porch. David glanced at the broken-handled mug atop the refrigerator, where the quarters for the Washeteria were kept, and then his gaze crashed into Violet’s, whose eyes had also gone automatically to the money.

While the sheets churned, David took Danielle to his favorite bar. The bartender was the same as in previous years; she said hello without recognizing him, the generic hospitality of a tourist town. He had begun to tell Danielle about the local character who rode his horse through these very doors, reliably, every year, when she stopped him.

“You already told me that.”

“I did?” He wondered if he’d also told her about being beat up at this bar, if he’d trotted out that particular tall tale—his explanation for the divot in his forehead that he’d got by taking a header in the alley. He touched his scar and raised his eyebrows.

“Yeah, I heard all about that, too. You know, I’m beginning to feel like I could diagnose your problem.”

“I don’t want a diagnosis.” But then he discovered that he’d rather know it than not. “All right, what?”

“You perseverate.”

“I don’t even know what that means.”

“Not knowing doesn’t exempt you. You live in the past—you revisit the same things over and over. This place is nothing but a big nostalgia trip for you. I don’t know what the story is with you and that family, but—”

He inserted himself here. “Messy breakup with Violet,” he lied. “The others—”

“I. Don’t. Care,” Danielle said. He could tell from her expression that she didn’t. The details bored her. Neon beer signs turned her face green, then yellow. She was as mechanically unmoved as one of the machines she manned at the hospital, merely charting a human condition. “Just for a change, how about you ask me something?” she proposed. “How about that?”

“O.K.” David thought for a moment. “How old was that other boyfriend?”

“Seventy,” she said.

“Wow.”

“My parents were spinning in their graves, a man as old as them. But I loved him with all my heart.”

“Why?”

“ ‘Why?’ ” Danielle leaned back, focussing on David’s face. “Two questions in a row. It’s a record. But whatever. I’d rather visit my weird situation than hear about yours. I loved Franklin because, when we talked, I always felt as if we were wandering around in a big house, a big house with endless rooms, and every time we came to a closed door in one of those rooms we were able to open it. Open doors, open doors, one after another. That’s why I loved him.”

David imagined the house, the wind circulating through those rooms, doors swinging on hinges.

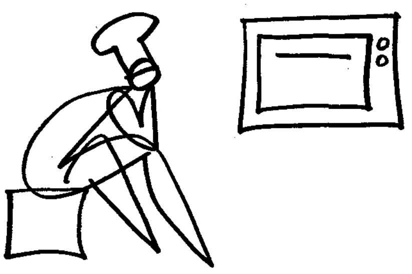
“You can’t smoke in here,” the bartender came over to tell Danielle as soon as she lit up. “New law.”

Danielle suddenly laughed. “I love drinking before noon,” she declared.

“It’s a great high,” David agreed. “The altitude really helps.” He was tempted to tell her about the BIOTA club—blame it on the altitude—but was afraid that he already had.

Back at the Washeteria, they couldn’t locate their load of sheets and underwear. Every machine was empty. “What the fuck?” David said. The floor was damp and smelled of chlorine. There was nobody to appeal to, the business a self-service one; upstairs were apartments, blameless tenants. “*You* tell her,” he said to Danielle. She shrugged, willing. Her record was still relatively clean. He watched from the street as Danielle knocked on the front door. When Violet answered it, she sneezed into the sunlight.

“*Bless* you,” David heard. Then the two women went inside, the door banging behind them. David waited. He studied the garbage can, latched the clip so that bears wouldn’t overturn it, swiped his hand on the creosote-treated light pole just to have the odor on his fingers. Finally, Danielle emerged.



“What took so long?”

“None of your beeswax. I wrote her a check—she can buy six-hundred thread count. And we exchanged numbers. We might share a trainer this fall.”

“I don’t actually know what you’re talking about.”

“You’re in shock,” Danielle said. “I’ve seen it before.”

“Shock?”

“The dead dad?” *Duh*, her tone said.

Dr. Hart. David saw him suddenly at the kitchen table, a few of his university cronies alongside, bearded and complaining around the glowing wine bottle—bastard politicians, pretentious films, popular potboilers, historical rogues, critical tirades turned into a competitive sport—while Mrs. Hart floated around humming, serving food, salving childhood wounds, providing pajamas and lighters and answers to all manner of esoteric inquiry: Who the hell was that poet? Where, oh, where is the blankie? Even then, when David was a boy, allowed to sit beside Dr. Hart, to sip at the wine if he wanted to, to receive an occasional fond pat on the back, he had recognized the difference between Dr. Hart and those others. Concerning a certain slim novel that Dr. Hart had just the day before handed to David, one particular colleague had sneered, “Is that any good?” A gauntlet, made of contempt.

“Oh, my God,” Mrs. Hart murmured, rolling her eyes indulgently.

“Dad’s trashy habit,” Violet singsonged.

“Well,” Dr. Hart had confessed, “I did like it.”

“I liked it, too!” David had declared, heart swollen with pride, pledging loyalty to his king. Everyone in the room laughed, even little ignorant Lydia, and he felt himself shrink back to size: skinny boy on quaking stool, squawking sidekick to the great man.

Still, he *had* been a great man, hadn’t he?

“Keys?” Danielle said, out of nowhere. Apparently, she had been waiting, palm out, fingers wiggling. "I should drive."

It snowed that night. They stayed at a lodge on the edge of town, down by the river, by the former train station where the outbuilding had burned. David opened his mouth to tell the story, then couldn't remember whether he'd already told it and didn't want to be scolded for perseverating. Diagnosis, indeed. He did appreciate Danielle's accepting the change in plans. She did not seem shocked by his deceit, and she offered a functioning credit card at the front desk. David himself was consigned to cash, which he readily provided—what he had of it—promising to make up later what he owed.

"No reason to ruin the weekend," Danielle said. E.R. nurse: David had to admire her unflinching willingness to roll with the punches. In this way, too, she reminded him of a man. When she undressed, he watched from behind, mentally shearing off her long hair so as to see only the wide swimmer's shoulders and narrow hips, her overmuscled calves, her feet perhaps flat, certainly large. Then she swung around, her breasts dispelling any lingering sense of masculinity.

"I think it's only fair to tell you that I'm not using protection," she said, in the middle of sex.

David laughed, relieved to be in the throes of someone else's story, in whatever weave of fabrication allowed her to think her admission, at this late date, honorable. "Duly noted," he said.

"I was pregnant before, with the married man, and I aborted. I really wish I hadn't. It's my big regret. Franklin," she added.

The image of that man had been taking shape in David's mind, a dead man like Dr. Hart, and that's who he was thinking about as they finished having unprotected sex.

Danielle wore one of David's jackets when they went out walking on their third and last evening in Telluride. He was glad to be able to do something for her, clutching at any small favor. They stopped by the trash cans outside the Hart house, as snow fell around the warm glow of the window. The tentative green of spring would not be killed by this storm. It was a harmless piece of winter, an errant cold cloud making a pit stop here, inflicting no permanent damage. Inside were the women, the mother and three daughters; Judy Hart still wore the braid down her back, her hair silver now against her bronze face. She smiled, sitting at the head of the table, facing the window, where she could see only her own reflection. Others crossed the small space, moving from stove to sink to refrigerator, a tight choreography with which David was intimately familiar. Then strangers filled the room, two men and two little boys, Pris's children, who would no doubt be sent to sleep in the back bedroom upstairs, under the drawings made by their mother and their aunts. And by David. His scrawls were up there, too.

"Looking in like this reminds me of a snow globe," Danielle said, quiet and low. "Except we're in the snow and they're in the globe." There had been drinks with dinner. David held her hand happily, quietly. He wished that Priscilla would step onto the porch and discover his happiness; he needed to display it, to prove it.

He saw Lydia embrace one of the men, from the back, lean over him as he sat at the table and put her face beside his. Her hair was the same blond straggle from childhood.

It had been Mrs. Hart who'd discovered David and Lydia in bed together, one morning long ago, only days before Pris's wedding, when David was officially an adult and Lydia officially not. Mrs. Hart had opened the door after rapping briefly. "Lyd?" Then closed her eyes at the sight of David's bare chest. She hadn't been angry; she was a kind, kind woman, whose disappointment was far harder to bear than her anger. "Let's not tell your father," she'd suggested to Lydia, still standing there at the door, eyes averted. "I'm afraid he won't understand."

Danielle asked David now, "Do you wish you were in there instead of out here?"

"No," he said. And then he reviewed his response. It was a lie—or else it wasn't. ◆

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STIFFS

Mel Brooks and Edward Albee on monsters and madmen.

BY JOHN LAHR

"I went into show business to make a noise, to *pronounce myself*," Mel Brooks told Kenneth Tynan in 1977. "I want to go on making the loudest noise to the most people." In "Young Frankenstein" (at the Hilton)—the new Broadway musical version of Brooks's 1974 film, co-written with Gene Wilder, which spoofed both Mary Shelley's novel and the gothic genre—Brooks pronounces away (he is listed five times on the poster), and he certainly makes a lot of noise. The original "Frankenstein" was the result of a literary challenge: Lord Byron proposed a contest to see who could produce the scariest story to pass a rainy summer in Switzerland in 1816. "Young Frankenstein" is a response to a commercial challenge: can Brooks surpass the astronomical revenues of his last show, "The Producers," which grossed more than half a billion dollars worldwide? But, although there is plenty of electricity in the air at "Young Frankenstein," lightning doesn't strike twice. With its slack plot and its inflated production numbers, the show transforms a tale of romantic agony into a theatrical agony.

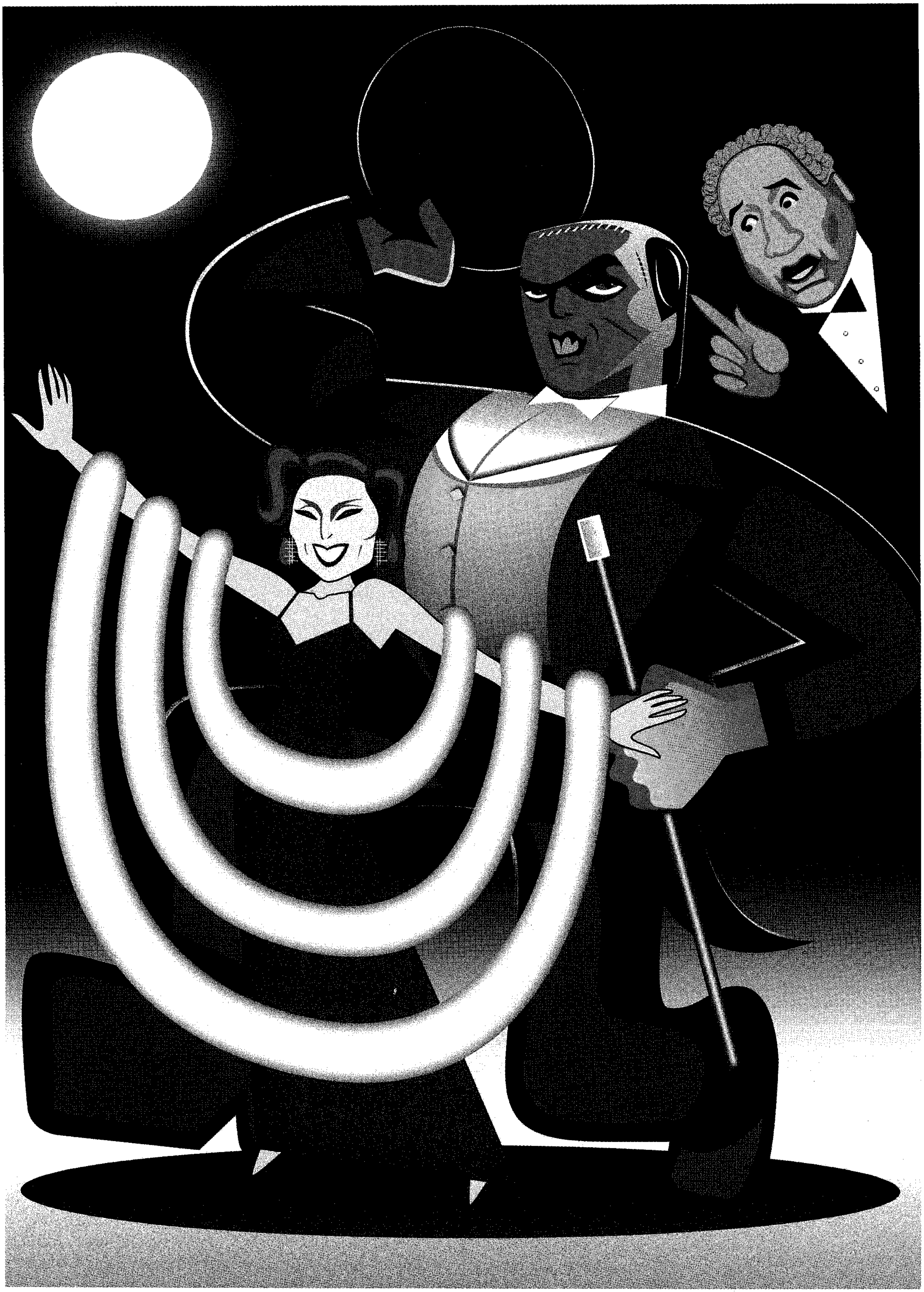
"Young Frankenstein" is, like the labor of its scientist hero, Frederick Frankenstein, an "experiment in reanimation." But those who live by the film-into-musical formula also die by it. The show, whose scenery and gags are often quotations from the movie, is haunted by the model it seeks to adapt. The ghosts of Gene Wilder, Teri Garr, Cloris Leachman, Marty Feldman, Madeline Kahn, and Peter Boyle shadow the musical's hardworking actors. Roger Bart, as Frederick, is noisy but unnuanced, lacking Wilder's crotchety vulnerability. Sutton Foster, as Inga, his Bavarian booty call, has a leggy charm but generates no real comic chemistry with her bellowing leading man. Only Andrea Martin, as Frau Blucher, the housekeeper and lover of the late Victor von Frankenstein ("He vas my boyfriend"), manages to stamp her droll personality and her sense of timing on the hectic proceedings; Martin has been dealt a low narrative hand, but she turns it into a full house. Otherwise, this all-singing, all-dancing, all-mugging production is a semaphore not of life but of drowning; the performers are swallowed up by the cavernous holes in the script (by Brooks and Thomas Meehan), and the generic songs (by Brooks) add nothing to the satire or to the momentum of the show.

These are hard words to write. We need more of the antic on Broadway, and Brooks is an expert at taking liberties. The pinwheeling freedom of his humor can create an atmosphere of wild exhilaration; even at his silliest, he is loved by audiences for his desperate desire to banish their troubles. How else can you explain theatregoers' acceptance of corny gags in "Young Frankenstein" that would be booed off the stage at any amateur comedy slam? When Frederick travels to Europe to inherit his grandfather's cliff-top castle, for instance, he gets off a train and says to a shoeshine man, "Pardon me, boy, is this the Transylvania Station?" "*Ja, ja*," the man replies. "Track 29. Can I give you a shine?" When Frederick arrives at the castle, raps on the behemoth door with a fixture that resembles a gymnast's rings, and says, "Wow, what knockers!," Inga replies, "Oh, sank you, Doctor." These burlesque gags are like paper fed to a fire: they add to the flame without giving off much heat.

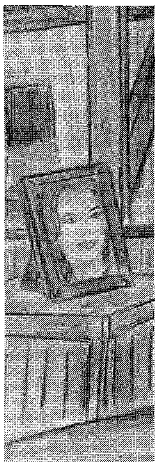
Brooks takes the Roman-candle approach to comedy. He produces a lot of sparks; some fizzle and some fly. At least twice in this exhausting show, his shtick spirals into almost visionary nuttiness. The song "Roll in the Hay," during which Frederick canoodles with Inga in the back of a wagon driven by two pantomime horses, is a wonderful production number that improves on the film. Here, Susan Stroman, who is the show's director and choreographer, provides some innovation. As Inga yodels with pleasure—a sidesplitting bit of idiocy—Stroman creates the illusion of movement: trees roll by and the heads of the bobbing horses keep time with the bouncing protagonists. By contrast, the scene in which Frederick and the Monster (the affecting Shuler Hensley), in top hat and tails, perform Irving Berlin's "Puttin' on the Ritz"—which was inspired in the movie—has become the musical's eleven-o'clock number and is expanded to the point of trivialization. On the Brooksian principle that more is more, Stroman throws every possible choreographic and cinematic trope at the song—a shadow dance, strobe lights, risers, virtually the entire cast. The number wins the battle but loses the war; its success only emphasizes the longueurs that surround it.

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" begins with an epigraph from "Paradise Lost": "Did I solicit thee/From darkness to promote me?" To Milton's question, "Young Frankenstein" answers with a loud "fuckin' A!" Comedy turns aggression into delight; Brooks is a kind of tummler who wants to put it to the audience, and this priapic ambition always comes out in his work. Brooks's monster doesn't kill Frankenstein's fiancée, Elizabeth (Megan Mullally); instead, he shags her in a cave. "Woof!" Elizabeth cries out—Broad-

ROBERT RISKO



Megan Mullally, Shuler Hensley, and Mel Brooks take an all-singing, all-dancing, all-mugging look at the Frankenstein story.



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way's version of a wolf whistle—before emerging from the cave to sing "Deep Love," a hymn to the Monster's "long love / incredibly long love." Inevitably, the Monster's "enormous schwanzstucker" ends up, through an act of scientific transference, belonging to the good doctor, and Inga has her own chance to bark at the moon. This is Brooks's last laugh on the characters; ironically, however, it is also the last laugh on the show, which for all its huffing and puffing just can't get it up.

While Brooks's Dr. Frankenstein gets the most sensational penis enlargement in history, Peter, the bland, contented forty-something textbook publisher in Edward Albee's "Peter and Jerry" (under the direction of Pam MacKinnon, at the Second Stage), is plagued by the opposite problem: "My penis seems to be . . . retreating," he says. In this eloquent play, which combines Albee's 1958 début one-act, "The Zoo Story," with "Homelife," a one-act prequel that he wrote in 2003, Albee extends his original provocative meditation on sexuality and solitude to include an examination of the manicured lawn of Peter's domestic desires. Peter (Bill Pullman), whose wife, Ann (Johanna Day), affectionately calls him Mr. Circumspection, lives a life that is as smooth-surfaced as the modern Danish furniture that fills his apartment. He has two children, two cats, two parakeets. ("God, I love symmetry," he exclaims at one point.) By all accounts, the marriage has been a happy one, "a smooth voyage on a safe ship," as he describes it to Ann. Nonetheless, Ann, in the course of a comradely heart-to-heart, lets it be known that she hankers for more of the animalistic in her life—for violent, tumultuous sex. But, she adds, "that's not your makeup—not *in* you." Peter is all Apollonian, and Ann hankers for a little more of the Dionysian in their well-ordered house.

Peter owes his eerie calm to his ability to cut himself off from life. At the opening of the play, he sits reading and doesn't at first hear his wife's questions or even register her presence; when he's reading, he explains, he goes into a trance. But that trance seems to continue when he puts his book down; in his daily life, he can't access either his anger or his passion. When his wife tells him, without rancor, that he's "good at making love . . . but . . . lousy at fucking," he is too buttoned up to show any distress. He confesses to having participated in an incident at a college orgy in which he was "very bad." "It was real exciting, and disgusting, and it turned me on in an awful way," he says, blind to the chaos of his own polymorphous perversity. What Albee is trying to flush out into the open here is the elusive way in which the unconscious can short-circuit desire. As Peter sets off for a walk in Central Park, Ann calls out, "Don't take any wooden nickels." The phrase is a reminder to the country bumpkin to stay alert, to keep his eyes open. But Peter, who is more or less sleepwalking, misses the point. "Don't take any what?" he says.

At the Park, which is where the original "Zoo Story" begins, he encounters a "permanent transient" named Jerry (Dallas Roberts), who embodies all the danger and the turmoil and the sadistic excitement that Peter has banished from his life. Jerry exists in a terrible isolation. "Have I been walking north?" he asks; literally and figuratively, he has lost his bearings. He has just been to the zoo, a visit that has confirmed both his sense of being caged and his sense that the rest of humanity is divorced from the animal instincts that possess and obsess him. Peter and Jerry's conversation is dominated by Jerry's long story of a ferocious dog at his boarding house—"malevolence with an erection"—which he tried first to appease, then to poison, before reaching a kind of stalemate, in which he and the dog "neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other."

Jerry wants to die, and he has chosen Peter to kill him. He provokes a fight, giving him a knife, taunting him to "fight for your manhood, you pathetic little vegetable." For a split second in this violent encounter, Peter is excited. (The stage direction reads, "Jerry impaled on the knife at the end of Peter's still firm arm.") "You're an animal. You're an animal, too," Jerry crows, as he lies dying. Jerry's gesture—and Albee's accomplishment—is to force Peter to face his own murderous feelings and the anarchy of desire. ♦

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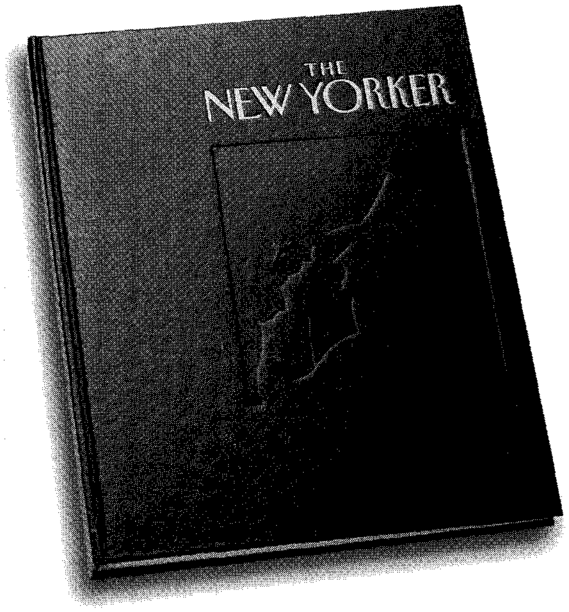

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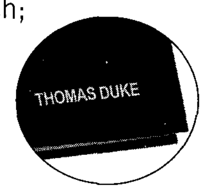

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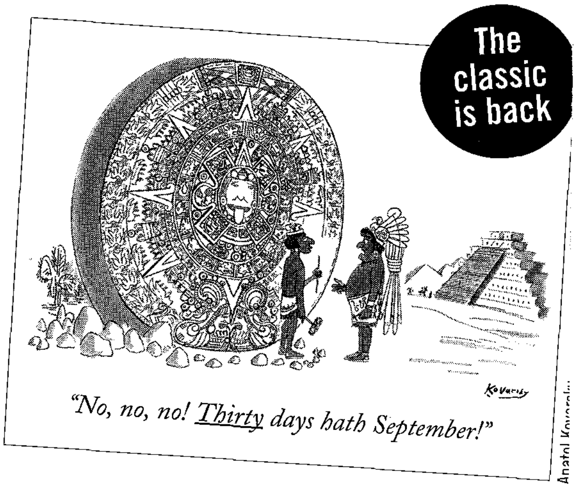
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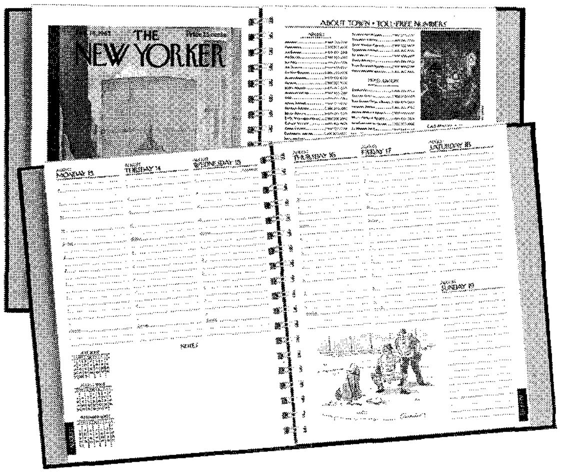
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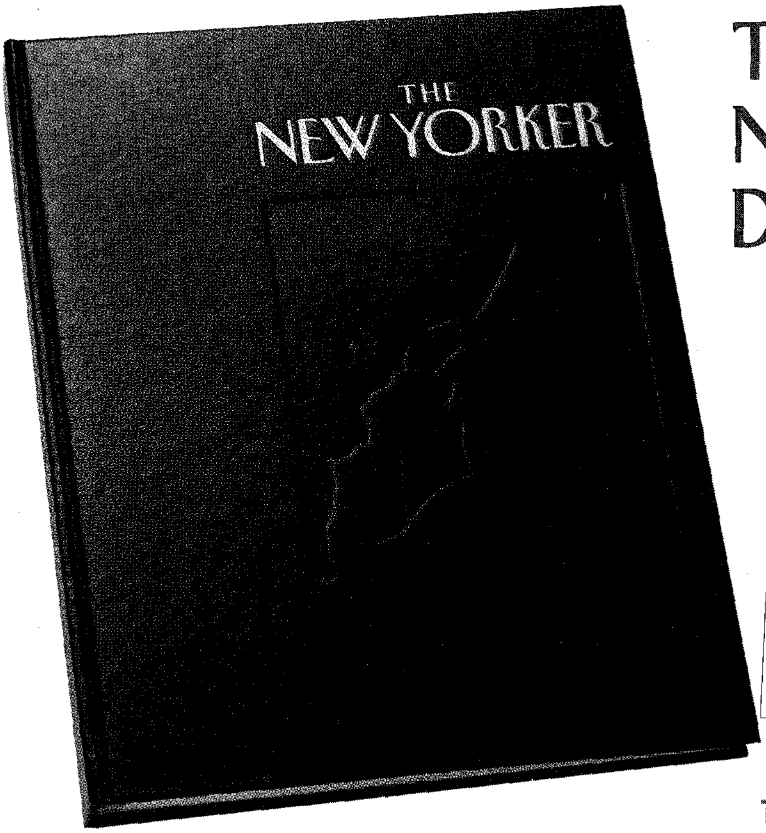

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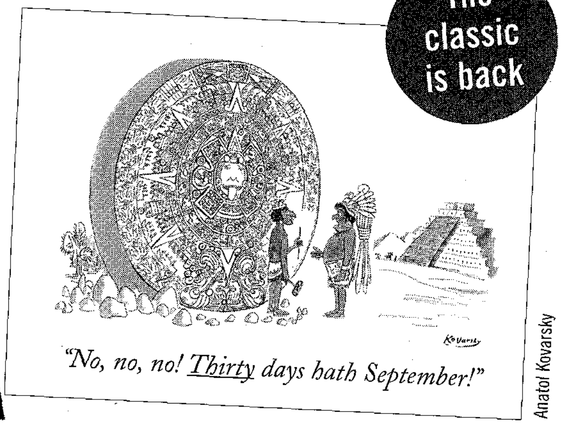

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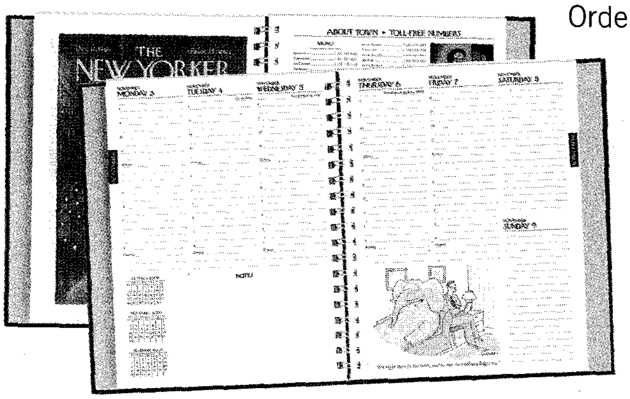

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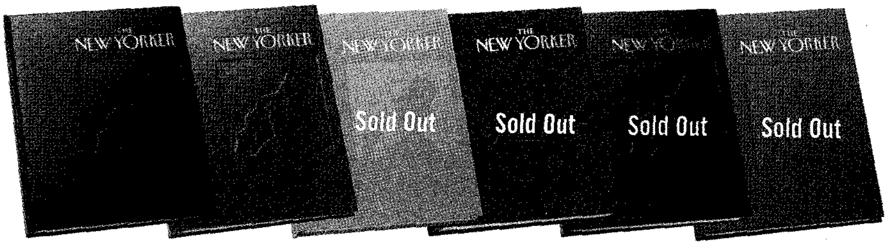

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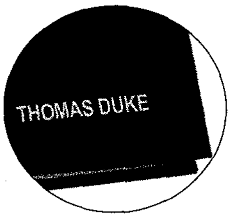

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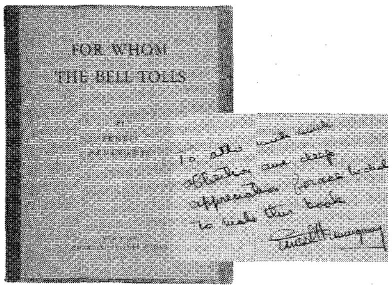

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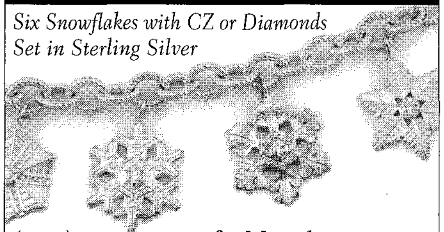

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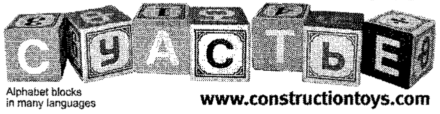

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BOOKS

LATE AND SOON

Mark Strand and Robert Hass, collected in tranquillity.

BY DAN CHIASSON

American poetry of the nineteen-sixties was a contest of brilliant, unforgettable boasts: "I myself am hell," Robert Lowell insists; "I eat men like air," Sylvia Plath crows; "Versing, I shroud among the dynasties," John Berryman struts. For a moment—the so-called "confessional" moment—the recipe for poetic power was misery mixed with braggadocio. Mark Strand and Robert Hass, two of our finest contemporary poets and both former United States Poet Laureates, started writing at that moment. And yet they occcupy a temperate middle region often thought to be inhospitable to the imagination, which thrives (as Lowell's, Plath's, and Berryman's did) at the poles: burning and freezing, loving and hating, torn between Shakespeare's "comfort and despair." ("When Shakespeare wrote, 'Two loves I have,' reader, he was *not kidding*," Berryman writes.) An entire zone of "ordinary" emotion—where most of us spend most of our time—had not been represented in American poetry. Strand and Hass, more comfortable than despairing, write in that zone.

Both poets have new, retrospective books: Strand's is "New Selected Poems" (Knopf; $26.95), heavy on his work of the past twenty years; Hass's is "Time and Materials" (Ecco; $22.95), his first book of new poems in a decade. They sound nothing alike. Strand is almost always suave, while Hass can be disarmingly, even embarrassingly, intimate; Strand is cunning, while Hass is candid. I am sure that they read each other; I have no idea whether they admire each other's work. Comparisons are odious. But the strange fact is that Hass is best when, within his own range, he aspires to a Strand-like coolness, while Strand, in his sublime recent work, has found (always at a slant) a way of sounding like a confidant. Both long ago outgrew the manners that made them famous; their recent poems feel like repudiations of early, too easy mastery.

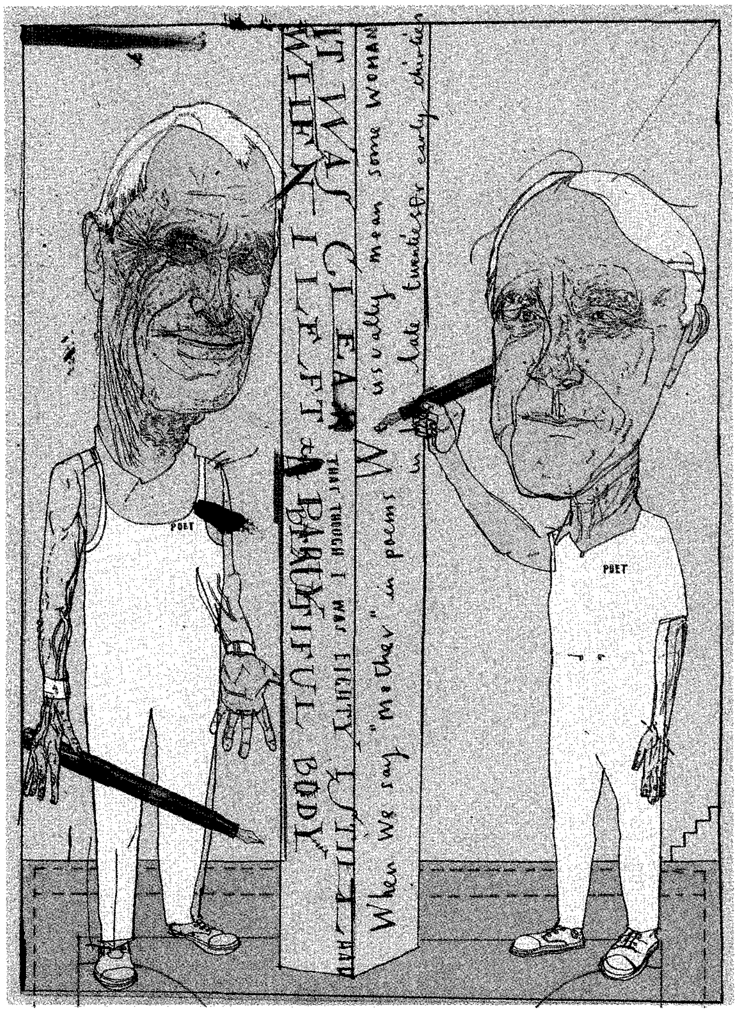
Strand was born in 1934 in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, a place so gusty, it seems, that it blew Strand and his parents almost immediately away. Strand's childhood reads like a flip book of potential identities: it was spent in Halifax, Montreal, New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Colombia, Peru, and Mexico. The imaginations of many American poets were formed in response to boring childhoods (think of John Ashbery on his father's fruit farm in Sodus, New York, or Lowell overhearing, in "91 Revere Street," the endless snorts and whinnies of his parents' quarrels in a Beacon Hill town house), but Strand's imagination, abstract and remote, seems to have been formed in defiance of a childhood that was a little too stimulating. With his multiple-choice life, Strand seems that scarcest of things: a poet without an autobiography.

And yet this anti-identity comes to be Strand's identity. Strand is one of the few living poets who can be said to have written a famous poem (Hass, whose "Meditation at Lagunitas" is an anthology piece, is another), an account of motiveless peripeteia called "Keeping Things Whole":

> In a field
> I am the absence
> of field.
> This is
> always the case.
> Wherever I am
> I am what is missing . . .
>
> We all have reasons
> for moving.
> I move
> to keep things whole.

As an existential anti-anthem, this poem is powerful but dated; it seems to me better read as a poem about the helplessness of being a child, subject to the mystifying choices of one's parents, and to the pharisaical justifications they offer for those choices. The child substitutes his own fanciful logic for the parents' overly factual account of the world; fancy is his armor against the depredations of that world. "I move to keep things whole" is the self-protective motto of a kid whose shame forces him to keep his parents' secrets.

We also move (children do this almost perpetually) in order to be pined after. In his essay "A Poet's Alphabet," Strand writes, "For those neither famous nor dead, at the bottom of their yearning to be absent is the hope that they will be missed." Strand feels toward that missing child (and we feel toward Strand, from whom the child always seems in some crucial way to be missing) tenderness without an object of tenderness, since you can't feel tender toward an absence. The absence extends to Strand's physical appearance: in photographs, he looks like the sum total of the idea of "handsome"—an average of tastes, the result of a straw poll about good looks. He's aware of this; his poems often present his life as merely an aggregation of others' uses of him.


IT WAS CLEA
THAT THOUGH I WAS EIGHTY
I LEFT A BEAUTIFUL BODY
POET
POET
When we say "mother" in poems we usually mean some woman in late twenties or early thirties

Strand and Hass are often best when they stray into the other's territory.

Has any male poet written so well about powerlessness? In "My Life," a wry ages-of-man poem that appeared in Strand's 1970 collection "Darker," the poet starts life as his mother's doll (" 'Talk, talk,' she would beg"), only to become his wife's volume of Kierkegaard ("My wife took me down from the shelf. / I lay in her arms. 'We suffer / the sickness of self,' she would whisper"), before passing rapidly back into doll life:

> Now my daughter
> gives me a plastic nurser
> filled with water.
> "You are my real baby," she says.

"Second childishness, and mere oblivion," Shakespeare's vision of old age, comes early to the father made a "real baby" by his tyrannizing child; the oblivion here is not death but the denial of interiority, Strand's daughter's insistence that he be nothing but a doll to be suckled on water.

Strand's vision of himself in these early poems—in "My Life" he is a dummy, a baby doll, a well-worn *idée reçue*—derives in part from the humiliating passivity of writing poetry. Waiting for inspiration to strike can feel, Strand says, like trying to create a cat from a bowl of milk or a thief from an open wallet; poets are effects waiting for their causes to arrive, acts without available agents. "My Life by Somebody Else" is Strand's farcical invocation to the muse:

> I have done what I could but you avoid
> me.
> I left a bowl of milk on the desk to tempt
> you.
> Nothing happened. I left my wallet there,
> full of money.
> You must have hated me for that. You
> never came.

By the end, "Somebody else has arrived. Somebody else is writing." This somebody else is the successfully distanced authorial self, suddenly able to depict the "inner self" by seeing it as a foreigner. Many poets—Rimbaud, Whitman, Borges—have noticed that, in the act of composition, the self splits eerily into subject and object, and "My Life by Somebody Else" is in some ways only a minor addition to that literature of self-division. But Strand differs from his masters in the extent to which he drains inner life of all content. There's no "life" in there, no secrets, no pain, no childhood: nothing for him or anybody else to uncover, only depictions inside of depictions, like nesting dolls or facing mirrors. This was a radical stance in an era that had made interiority the source of poetic power; it was also, as Strand soon found out, a dead end.

"New Selected Poems" is a necessary book, because Strand has done his best work—and it's among the best work by any living poet—since the publication, in 1980, of his first "Selected Poems." That stage of Strand's career culminated in "The Monument," a long, comely, tenaciously clever, finally tedious poem addressed to its own translator several hundred years in the future. As in too many poems from the period, Strand was playing totally to his strengths; the result, like a home-run derby, is an impressive display that doesn't count in the win-loss column. Strand's recent work feels less like that leisurely middle period and more like the early work, extended now by agony, aging, the deaths of intimates. Strand has become the parodist of contentment who, nevertheless, finds himself enormously contented; this unlikely second-order happiness, happiness in spite of finding happiness groundless, is grounds for further, deeper parody.

Something else has changed: Strand is now old, and in the background of his

DAVID HUGHES

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poetry of the past ten years a ticking clock makes the subtle self-consciousness feel absurd. The baffled, foreshortened poems of that decade are almost all brief lyrics, their brevity due to Strand's refusal, in work otherwise painstakingly retrospective, to grant them access to his past. Strand's speakers, cut off from the source of their sadness, sometimes attempt to substitute vanity. "Old Man Leaves Party" opens with an unforgettable boast:

> It was clear when I left the party
> That though I was over eighty I still had
> A beautiful body.

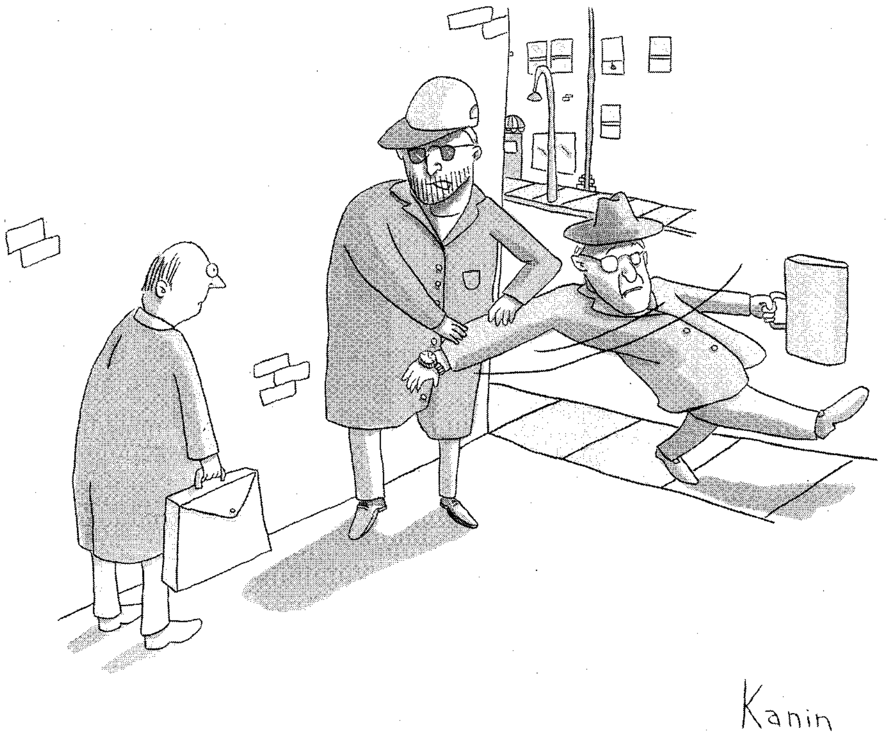
Nature, as though sensing a poet in its midst, promptly furnishes the right props: a moon shines down, the wind stops, a mirror conveniently appears, leaning against a tree. Strand's octogenarian, both a sendup of narcissism and a new-style Narcissus, then performs, for the benefit of an audience of poetic conventions, the apportioned striptease:

> Making sure that I was alone, I took off my shirt.
> The flowers of bear grass nodded their moonwashed heads.
> I took off my pants and the magpies circled the redwoods.

This may be the first pastoral poem ever written where we can't be confident that the speaker is not urinating on nature. (The next detail is a "creaking river" now "flowing once more.")

"Old Man Leaves Party" defies paraphrase—it's gorgeous, twilit, and touching, and a farce. The speakers of Strand's newest poems—the aging partygoer, a connoisseur drinking a fine Beaune, an erstwhile polar explorer—are nearly all this internally various. Buffoons whom the poet nevertheless loves, they represent his new empathy for that old absurdity the self. The same sun that is setting on Strand—poem after poem takes place at the beach—is setting also on Strand's old fools. In the last section of the last poem in this book, a self-consciously belated commentary on Jesus' last seven words, Strand, as though exhausted from having passed through so much time, stares at the sunrise over the sea:

> Back down these stairs to the same scene,
> to the moon, the stars, the night wind. Hours pass
> and only the harp off in the distance and the wind
> moving through it. And soon the sun's gray disk,
> darkened by clouds, sailing above. And beyond,
> as always, the sea of endless transparence, of utmost
> calm, a place of constant beginning that has within it



"Rolex?"

what no eye has seen, what no ear has
  heard, what no hand
has touched, what has not arisen in the
  human heart.
To that place, to the keeper of that place,
  I commit myself.

However beautiful these lines, they also possess a deliberate blandness, a literariness, that obstructs their power. The word "commit," which means both "to devote" and "to consign," is wonderfully apt for a late style that seems at once more energetic than most and, movingly, more drained.

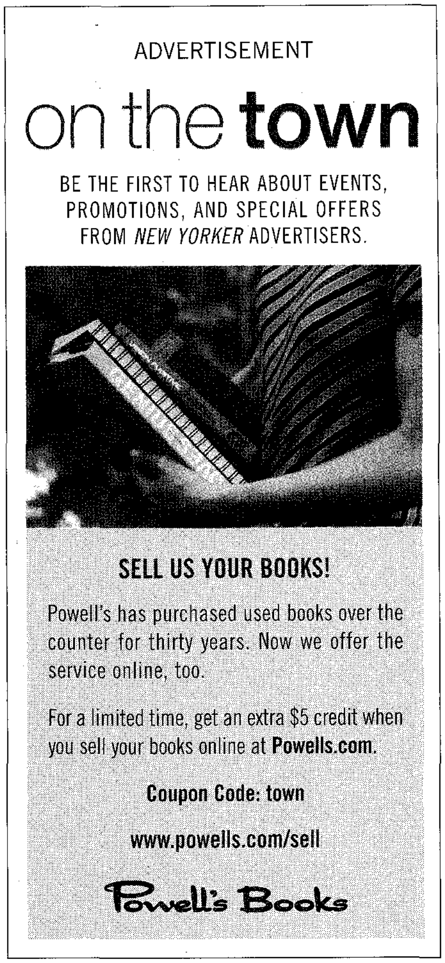
The best recent Strand poems tell the life stories of non-Strands, anyone-but-Strands, who nevertheless depict their author by photonegative. Robert Hass's poems have always included their author's "real" voice, facts that one could check, tones recognizable from Hass's excellent, often highly personal essays (personal even when their nominal subjects seem to forbid it: a technical lesson in meter or an appreciation of Basho, for example). "Time and Materials" gathers a decade's worth of Hass's poems. Warm and credulous, even tender, Hass sometimes fails at moods and gestures that Strand—and this is Strand's failing—would probably not attempt. Hass's is a poetry of first names (Rachels, Earlenes, Bills, and Cheryls), men and women whose intentions have mellowed toward one another, society that has splintered off into small dinner parties and hikes.

At its weakest, Hass's work might be characterized by the wry title of a Strand poem: "Our Masterpiece Is the Private Life." But he is redeemed by a technique that he has called variously "cutting" and "gathering," where salvage sits beside prized personal details. In his most astringent and disabusing work, Hass refuses to grant himself and his friends center stage. Though we learn rather a lot about his life from his poems (including much about his California childhood), he usually includes, alongside his own story, other details: something the neighbor kid said, some Chekhov, some Stevens, a haiku, and a recipe for onion soup. And it's all against the big backdrop of the West Coast—marshes and quinces and loquats. (The poem that includes these particular elements, and more, is called "Songs to Survive the Summer.") The zero-sum fluctuations of Hass's material, some intellect followed by some feeling, coolness here, warmth there, at times become a formula—more a recipe for soup than soup—but at other times yield work that, exquisitely receptive to actual happiness, has opened up new territory for the personal poem.

Poets learn a lot from their own most famous poems; chiefly, what not to do again. "Meditation at Lagunitas," probably Hass's best-known poem, is in fact among his weakest: its beauty is a period beauty, California out of the nineteen-seventies. ("There was a woman / I made love to and I remembered how, holding / her small shoulders in my hands sometimes, / I felt a violent wonder at her presence.") Its opening postulate, while rhetorically impressive, now feels tendentious, as though securing our agreement by nodding nervously. ("All the new thinking is about loss. / In this it resembles all the old thinking.") Encouraged by the haiku masters he has translated so well—Basho, Buson, and Issa—Hass seemed to want to appear a little more virtuous, a little less carnal than most American men. But "Meditation at Lagunitas" wields its chasteness like bait: it would be just the poem to get a chaste person to go to bed with you.

A poet capable of bringing thin work to such fine polish, seeing it praised and anthologized, has a choice: bask or run. Hass ran, and therefore his poems of the eighties and nineties sometimes disappointed those readers who were weaned on the vision of the mellow life, part Horace and part haiku, that Hass's early poems had offered. As though bored by his own story, he sometimes included the principle of resistance in himself or his readers. In "Berkeley Eclogue," an unnamed antagonist goads him to get on with his story: "*You can skip this part*," "*Let's get past this part*," "*Get past this part.*" In "Santa Barbara Road," Hass's college-age son, Leif, scolds him: "don't lay/your Buddhist trips on me." The stern voice of these skeptics got into Hass's ear. The resulting poems felt to many readers deliberately banal, hastily made, or shallow.

But Hass's work of the past twenty years, culminating in "Time and Materials," is his best, and its strengths derive en-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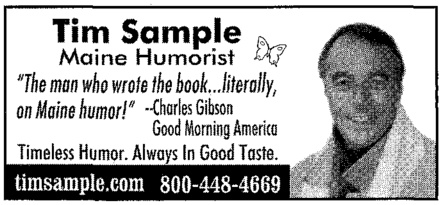
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tirely from that impulse to ransack his own lyric gift. In "Dragonflies Mating" (from "Sun Under Wood"), a portrait of Hass's alcoholic mother ("slurred, though carefully pronounced words," "mismatched clothes") is dissected, a moment later, with chilling forensic detachment:

When we say "mother" in poems,
we usually mean some woman in her late twenties
or early thirties trying to raise a child.

We use this particular noun
to secure the pathos of the child's point of view
and to hold her responsible.

An instruction manual for aspiring Hasses, these lines suggest that Hass's own story was learned from an instruction manual; of course, it wasn't, but the feeling of having lived a fill-in-the-blanks life is something that many autobiographical poets come to know. ("Really we had the same life," Lowell writes in a poem to Berryman, "the generic one/our generation offered.") Some of the self-cancellings and crossings-out in Hass's poems express the rich, Lowell-like frustration that autobiography gives houseroom to the generic, the conventional, and the cliché. At other times, as in the title poem of the new book, Hass, composing poems even as time erases his and his friends' lives, wants "to behave like time," to break meaning rather than to make it: "To score, to scar, to smear, to streak, / To smudge, to blur, to gouge, to scrape." Hass's wish to make poems resemble the world as closely as possible (his often remarked stylistic "clarity") has been a constant in his method from the start; what has changed is not the style but the vision of the world. Where "Meditation at Lagunitas" offered a body "as numinous as words," "Time and Materials" offers gouges and smudges.

"Then Time" is a magnificent new poem, probably Hass's best ever. The "girl" in "Meditation at Lagunitas" (or one like her) has become a woman ("Twenty years older, / She is very beautiful. An astringent person. She'd become, / She said, an obsessive gardener, her daughters grown"). Where once Hass might have located all the sentience in his own head, now, as in late James, sentience is collaborative, something people make together:

He's listening,
Studying her face, still turning over her remark.
He decides that she thinks more symbolically
Than he does and that it seemed to have saved her,
For all her fatalism, from certain kinds of pain.
She finds herself thinking what a literal man he is,
Notices, as if she were recalling it, his pleasure
In the menu, and the cooking, and the architecture of the room.

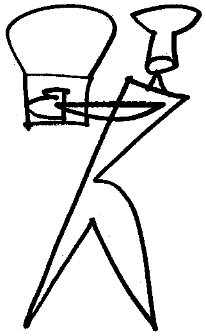
Whose point of view presides? "His" diagnosis of "her"—she "thinks more symbolically"—is subject to her diagnosis of him; he is "a literal man." Is this the poem of a "literal man," or is that attribute merely assigned to the speaker by a companion about whose mind the speaker possesses only inept, overliteral hypotheses? "Then Time" shows how lyric poetry can do what novels do so well, if at excruciating length: track the paths of consciousness and counter-consciousness across plots and characters.

Critics think a lot about how poets manage to get their lives into their work, but what poets often think about is the opposite problem: how to integrate their imaginative work into the social and family environments they inhabit. Being a poet doesn't help you cook a meal or bathe your three-year-old daughter; for Hass, being the poet in the house can mean having to steal a few moments of "Han Dynasty rhyme-prose" on "the stoop by our half-dug/still-imagined kitchen porch." Very few male writers in human history have even had to face this problem, and Hass and Strand are among the small handful who have written well about it. But now the busy and burdensome demands of the social world are, for both of these poets, in abeyance. Mortality is the new distraction. Remembered pleasure—"Drinking retsina and eating salads / Of cool, chopped cucumber"—has replaced direct sensation; "bliss" is now "what you glimpse / From the corner of your eye." These elegiac sentiments may seem to preclude self-deprecating humor, but Hass's poems, like Strand's, are funnier than ever. (In "Poem with a Cucumber in It," a poem about sex, Hass writes, "If you think I am going to make / A sexual joke in this poem, you are mistaken.") Both Strand and Hass have found late poetry that keeps company with death and yet, without sacrificing force or authority, minds its manners. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Sons and Other Flammable Objects, *by Porochista Khakpour (Grove; $24).* This début novel centers on an energetically discordant Iranian family living in the United States. As father, mother, and son fight to fit in while holding on to their roots, Khakpour explores ethnicity, nationalism, and post-9/11 fear—well-worn themes that are far less compelling than the exuberant originality of her style. The characters burst from the page in fiery exchanges, while their chaotic inner lives are conveyed with witty precision; a simple parting comment is accompanied by "a definite wink, a wink or maybe a squint, but a smile, possibly a grimace, more than a smile." Khakpour's comic sense of familial tensions—particularly father-son enmity—is infectious, but she does not quite succeed in developing this into a convincing story. On the other hand, this thinness of motivation is in key with the father's unwillingness to probe complicated sentiment, as he seeks refuge instead in his favorite command: "ENOUGH."

Ghost, *by Alan Lightman (Pantheon; $23).* In straightforward prose, Lightman tells the story of a divorced and childless forty-two-year-old man whose primary ambition has been to "understand the world," rather than change it. Believing that logic holds life together, he struggles to be content with his limited lot, but also admits to "searching for something" beyond himself, "some totality, which can be glimpsed only between the cracks." When he is let go from a mid-level banking position, he finds work in a mortuary, where, one day, he sees something he can only describe as a "vapor" apparently emanating from, or getting sucked into, a corpse. In the ensuing frenzy—a local paper gets wind of the story—he is forced to wrestle with fundamental beliefs about human existence. Unfortunately, Lightman's fine sense of the upheavals that can occur when an ordinary person confronts the inexplicable is marred by the hollowness of his central character.



A Life of Picasso: The Triumphant Years, 1917-1932, *by John Richardson (Knopf; $40).* "My work is like a diary," Picasso often said, and Richardson demonstrates the truth of this in the third installment of his biography. He rejoins Picasso after his Cubist stage, when Picasso is designing costumes for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and entering a primarily neoclassical period. The volume covers the years of his marriage to the Russian ballerina Olga Khokhlova, the mother of his only legitimate child, Paulo, and describes their lavishly bourgeois life style in Paris and their summers in the South of France. The most striking aspect of this surefooted account is the link that Richardson shows between the women in Picasso's life and the direction of his art. We witness the classic representations of his newlywed wife evolve, by the end of the marriage, into bifurcated demonic images; simultaneously, the entry of a teen-age mistress unleashes Picasso's sexuality, which infuses all his future work.

Bears, *by Bernd Brunner (Yale; $25).* This droll, heavily illustrated history of the relationship between humans and bears brims with curious facts and anecdotes. For instance, all bears are descended from a creature that was originally the size of a small terrier; bear shoulder blades have been used as sickles for cutting grass; Cree hunters put a lighted pipe in the mouth of their kill and blew smoke down its throat, to calm the animal's spirit; and today's polar bears weigh approximately two hundred pounds less than those of fifteen years ago, owing to the diminishment of winter feeding grounds. Brunner adroitly details the ways bears have been demonized, revered, and anthropomorphized by cultures that see them in contradictory terms—both lazy and fierce, wily and dim-witted—and tells the sad stories of humanity's attempts to domesticate and showcase these majestic, primarily reclusive beings.

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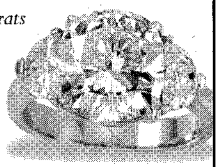

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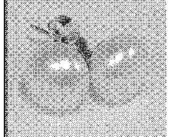

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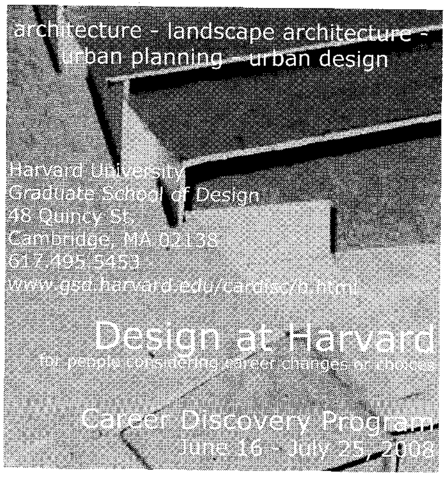

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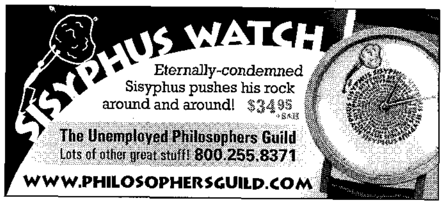

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POP MUSIC

LET IT RIP

Punk rock flourishes in Los Angeles.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

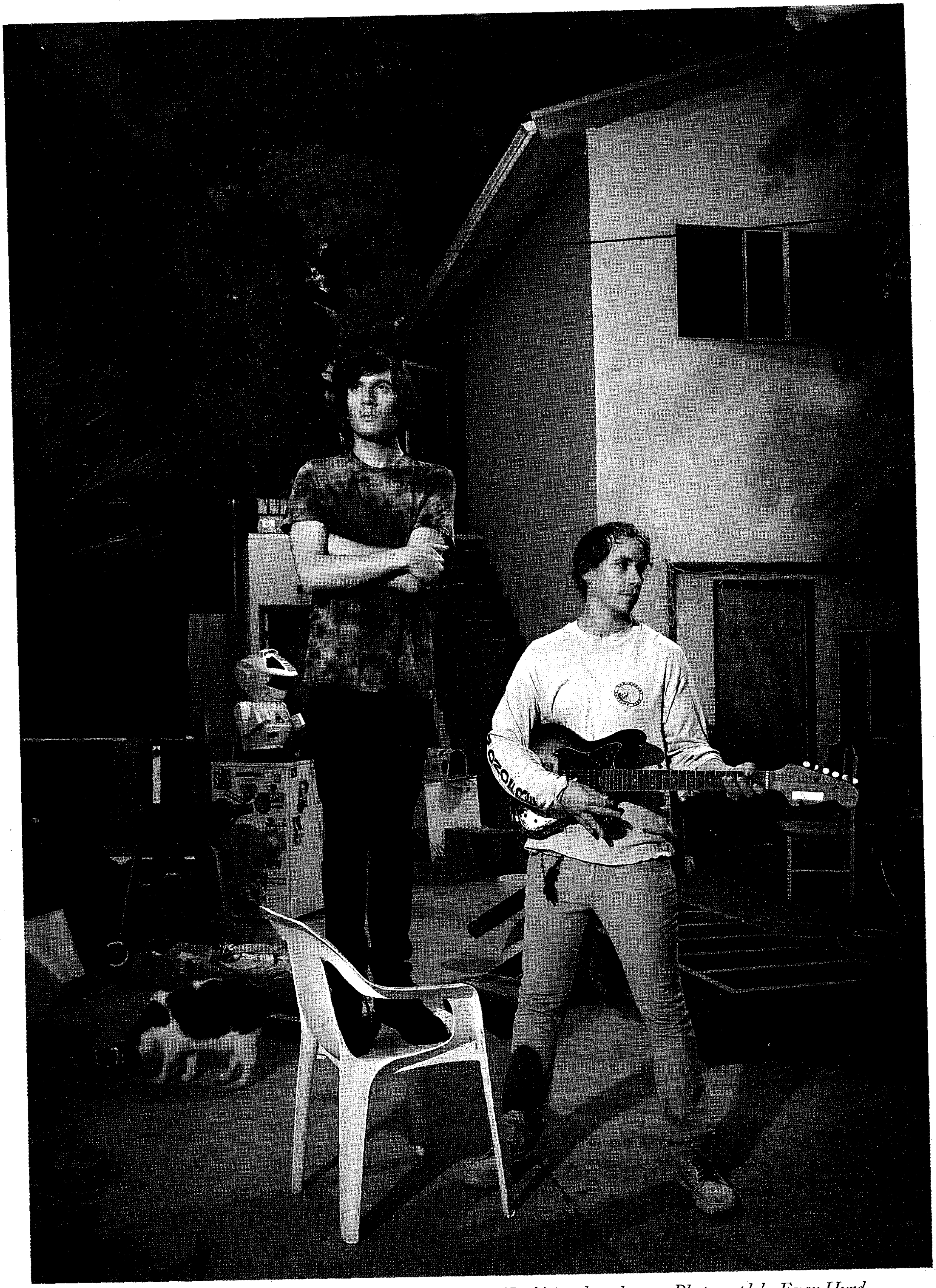
Popular music in Los Angeles has passed through several golden ages, each unlike the others. Perhaps the sounds most closely associated with the region are the sunny harmonies of the Mamas & the Papas and the Beach Boys, from the nineteen-sixties, or the soft rock of the Eagles, from the seventies. In the early eighties, a loose aggregation of punk-rock bands, including Black Flag and X, were responsible for an explosion of musical activity in the area, and by the end of the decade the hard-rock scene in Hollywood had yielded Guns N' Roses—along with a fashion for teased hair and tight leather pants, which helped propel the careers of similar but lesser bands. Now the punk-rock phase—which was also a golden age of skateboarding, the primary recreation for L.A. punk rockers—has been reborn in an appealingly communal form, thanks in large part to a local club called The Smell, to a noisy and often brilliant duo called No Age, and to the group's tight circle of friends.

The Smell, in a former Mexican grocery store on a desolate downtown block, was founded ten years ago by Jim Smith, a union organizer, and two partners. For two years, the club occupied a North Hollywood storefront (the name is an allusion to a nearby coffeehouse called Aroma Café); it moved to the grocery-store space in 2000. In 2002, No Age's members, Randy Randall, the guitarist, and Dean Spunt, the singer and drummer, began performing at the club as part of a group called Wives, as did, the following year, Mika Miko, a raucous all-woman band, which quickly attracted a large local following. Since then, other performance spaces have opened in derelict buildings and commercial sites in downtown L.A., and now half a dozen local bands, many of which can be described as punk, are giving concerts, making T-shirts, and releasing one another's records. But The Smell, which holds more than two hundred people, serves vegan snacks, and has a shelf of books and zines that clubgoers can borrow, remains the scene's hub. Randall and Spunt, who live in Hollywood, in a house with a half-pipe in the back yard, formed No Age in 2006, and frequently perform at the club. They have keys to the building, and Randall has been central to a four-year ongoing effort to install a second bathroom. (He helped dig the trench in the concrete floor to accommodate the new plumbing.)

No Age's album "Weirdo Rippers," which was released in August, is in some ways an homage to the club. The tray card under the CD is a photograph of thirty-three people standing in front of The Smell—local musicians and their supporters—and the album's cover features a photograph of the club's white façade, on which the words "No Age" and "Weirdo Rippers" have been painted (by Amanda Vietta, an artist and a friend of the band members'). When I visited The Smell last month, the words were still there. The club's interior walls are covered with murals—depicting bulbous birds, disembodied female heads with swooping bouffant hair, and a small forest of intertwining, hairy arms—painted by local artists and musicians, creating a colorful oasis inside a grim shell.

"Weirdo Rippers," which collects songs from vinyl EPs that No Age had previously released on small labels, contains most of the band's work to date. In the past year, bloggers on pop-music Web sites such as thefader.com and Brooklynvegan.com discovered and praised the group, and in October No Age played a joyous show to a full house at the Bowery Ballroom, in New York. At the end of the concert, several young audience members climbed onstage, one onto Randall's shoulders.

This enthusiasm is impressive, given that No Age's music is not instantly inviting. Listening to the album is a bit like



Dean Spunt and Randy Randall of No Age, a band at the center of L.A.'s punk-rock scene. Photograph by Evan Hurd.

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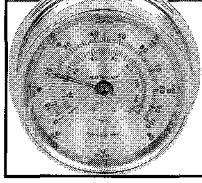

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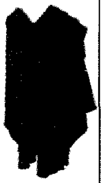

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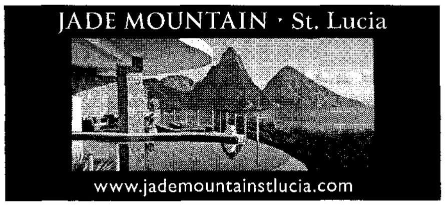

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entering a cave; it takes a few moments to acclimate your senses to No Age's methods. The band has no bass player, and Randall's guitar often sounds hazy and thick, with echoey effects. He tends to process his notes electronically, using pedals to inflate chords into sheets of glimmering noise that evoke the overwhelmingly distorted sound of bands like My Bloody Valentine and the Jesus and Mary Chain. Spunt's drumming and delivery is blunt, reminiscent of L.A. punk rock from the eighties, which scorned pretension.

One of No Age's most accessible songs, "Boy Void," could be a seven-inch punk-rock single from the early eighties. "Saw a horse, he ran into the back of the room, where the children go to cry," Spunt hollers, banging a relentless eighth-note beat on a floor tom. The words of the chorus are "It's so obvious, so obvious"—though it's not obvious what he means. Randall sticks to a basic four-chord march, backs off into a cloud of feedback, and then rejoins Spunt for the chorus. Like all No Age songs, this one is shorter than you expect it to be—the whole album is only thirty-two minutes long—and after a few listens the band's charms have lodged in your head: Spunt's spirited yells, the way the melodies are tucked into the racket, Randall's rainbow of guitar loops and shifting textures. "Weirdo Rippers" buzzes with a warm verve and the promise of impending rumpus. The more of the album you hear, the more logical it seems that such a goofy and chaotic band would attract a loyal following.

"Dead Plane," a gorgeous and sprawling song, was originally released by Teenage Teardrops, a label run by a man named Cali deWitt; he used to work at Jabberjaw, a defunct local club that in the early nineties frequently hosted Hole and Beck. The song begins with a gentle hum of processed guitar and swelling drums. After several minutes of formless noise, the song coheres, barrelling forward in the style of a classic punk-rock number. Spunt sings about a "sad, sick man" who seems to be harassing a woman "who needs the room." He concludes the track, firmly but not angrily, by singing, "I don't wanna fight you." The music dwindles to a jet trail of noise, which Randall carefully raises in pitch with a foot pedal as the sound fades away.

On October 30th, some of the regulars from The Smell showed up at the Music Box at Fonda, a large proscenium theatre (formerly the Henry Fonda) in Hollywood, where No Age was opening for the New York rock band Battles. (The venue is a sign of No Age's changing fortunes. The band recently signed to Sub Pop, the independent Seattle label that released Nirvana's early records; its current groups include the Shins and the Postal Service, both of which sometimes outsell major-label acts.) The Music Box was only a third full when No Age started to play. Spunt, who is twenty-five and slender, with shaggy brown hair and bright-blue eyes, sat in front of his drums on the right side of the stage. Randall, who is twenty-six and solid, with stringy blond hair, stood on the left side, facing the crowd, in front of an array of amplifiers. He spent much of the show looking at a series of pedals near his feet; when he stepped on them, his sound would triple in size or swirl or collapse. Both musicians played with ferocity, as if to a packed club. Spunt lifted his legs and arms high as he performed, and hit the drums harder when he sang.

At one point, Randall called out, "Anyone here been to The Smell?" A yell went up. "O.K., cool, that's good," Randall responded, and the band launched into a song from "Weirdo Rippers" called "Everybody's Down." Spunt stepped from behind his drum kit, walked to the front of the stage, and sang in a strong, clear voice, into a microphone on a stand, "I'm not afraid of laughter, because it's all feeling, too. Everybody's down, in every soul, and every town." Randall crossed the stage and crouched behind him, playing a steady two-chord pattern on his guitar. Then he returned to his side of the stage, stood on an amplifier, and continued to play. Spunt retreated to his drum kit and quietly counted himself back into the song. As Spunt pounded his drums, Randall leaped down from his perch and, with his guitar, started making the noise of three people playing. Heads down, the musicians seemed oblivious of everything but the music—and maybe their friends. ♦

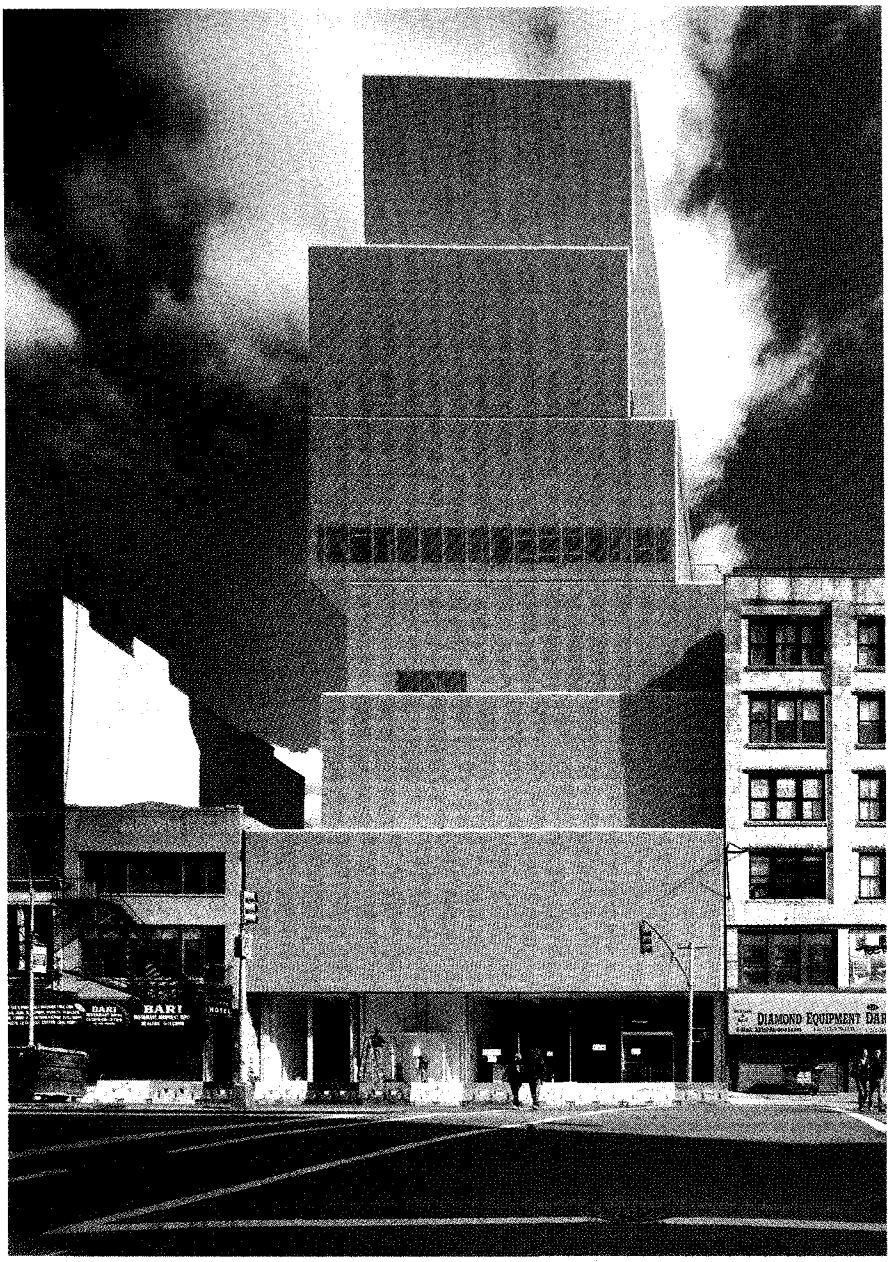
NEWYORKER.COM
Sasha Frere-Jones's pop-music blog.

THE SKY LINE

BOWERY DREAMS

A new home for the New Museum of Contemporary Art.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER



The tower contrasts dramatically with its setting. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

In the past few decades, American museums have discovered an easy way to get themselves noticed: put up a building by an international architect who hasn't built much in this country before. Too often, though, these exciting débuts go nowhere. Mario Botta's San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Josef Paul Kleihues's Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, and James Stirling's Sackler Museum, in Cambridge, all failed to earn their creators any more American museum commissions.

In 2002, when the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York began to plan for a new building on the Bowery, east of its previous location, in SoHo, it decided to limit the search to younger architects who had not built anything in New York. "We thought we should be consistent with our mission of supporting new art," Lisa Phillips, the director, told me. The search led the museum to SANAA, a twelve-year-old firm in Tokyo, whose principals, Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, are known for buildings of almost diaphanous lightness. When the museum hired them, Sejima and Nishizawa had just one American commission, the Glass Pavilion, at the Toledo Museum of Art, an eye-catching structure of curving glass walls, which opened last year. Their best-known work includes a low-slung circular art gallery with no clear front or back, in Kanazawa, Japan, and a design school in Essen, Germany, that is a concrete cube a hundred feet high, punctuated, seemingly at random, with windows of assorted sizes.

SANAA's refined style might seem odd on the Bowery, one of the grittiest streets in New York. The site, a former parking lot at the intersection with Prince Street, was framed by blocks of restaurant-supply stores, whose owners seemed to be the only property holders on the Lower East Side who showed no interest in selling out to condominium developers. But after two decades in SoHo the New Museum had seen both the upside and the downside of gentrification. Marcia Tucker established the museum in 1977—the day after she was fired from the Whitney for curating shows that it found too controversial—in order to focus on cutting-edge art. Yet as the museum grew larger it drifted from its radical beginnings, just as the Museum of Modern Art had done two generations before. The decision to move to the Bowery was perhaps a clever way of assuring its supporters that its agenda remains radical.

But things have changed since the New Museum purchased the lot, in 2002. There is now a Whole Foods nearby, several luxury condominiums within view of the museum's front door, and expensive shops, including a Ralph Lauren, amid the former tenements around the corner. The area hovers between a grungy past and an overpriced future. The New Museum may have

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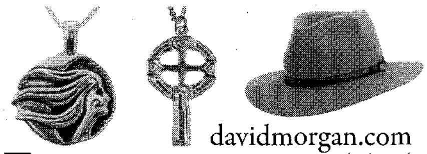
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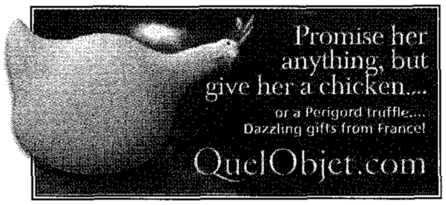
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left SoHo, but it is powerless to prevent SoHo from following it to the Bowery.

Sejima and Nishizawa have designed a building that is just right for this moment of the Bowery's existence. It is a pile of six boxes, stacked unevenly, like a child's blocks. Sometimes the blocks mount up in a pattern of setbacks like that of a traditional New York building; sometimes they jut out over open space in a way that suggests the architects had something more radical in mind. The building is original, but doesn't strain to reinvent the idea of a museum. Sejima and Nishizawa have a way of combining intensity with understatement.

What makes the museum unlike any other building in New York is its surface—corrugated-aluminum panels painted silvery gray, with an aluminum mesh suspended an inch and a half in front of them. The mesh is a standard industrial material but it gives the building the lightness of glass and the porosity of fabric. The visual signals this building sends—it is at once crisp and pliable, solid and permeable—seem deliberately ambiguous. When you look from a block or so away, the façade seems semitransparent—less like a wall than a scrim.

The depth and shadow and texture of the façade can be almost magical in the changing light. When you get near, however, the mystery is lost. You see that Sejima and Nishizawa have performed their magic with routine elements, and when you stand right in front of the building its metal mesh looks harsh, even abrasive. Once the museum opens, next month, the effect may be more welcoming: the ground floor is sheathed entirely in glass, and a gallery and bookstore will be visible from the street. At the moment, the museum is enticing from afar but off-putting up close.

Things get good again when you go through the door. SANAA's ability to design places that look simple but actually have a lot going on has resulted in galleries that combine the clear, flexible quality of loft spaces with some shrewd architectural intervention. The second, third, and fourth floors have large, white-walled exhibition spaces, with ceiling heights of as much as twenty-four feet. The galleries, illuminated in part by natural light (through skylights), have some of the virtues of neutrality but are more inviting than plain white boxes. The main gallery spaces are almost, but not precisely, rectangular. One wall is angled just a bit, reflecting the diagonal of the Bowery, but the shift is so subtle that you don't notice it until you look up and see that the front wall is not quite parallel to the steel beams that run across the ceiling. This gives the room a slight frisson, without making it any less flexible or hospitable to art. The floors are all finished in a richly toned polished concrete that has been poured without the usual expansion joints, allowing it to develop small cracks as it sets. It looks both ancient and modern, and has a stunning resonance against the stark walls. ("It almost looks like an Anselm Kiefer," Lisa Phillips said as we walked through, and she was exaggerating only slightly.)

There are more flourishes once you get away from the main exhibition area: aluminum-lined elevators painted a kind of electric chartreuse; shelves that snake through the lobby in a sensuous curve, the one counterpoint to the building's straight lines. The most exciting space in the building is only four feet wide and some fifty feet high, and is tucked behind the elevators: it contains a stairway connecting the third- and fourth-floor galleries. I have never been anywhere at once so eerily narrow and so gloriously monumental. The stair hall, if you can call it that, has a large window with a view to the north, and a landing that opens onto a tiny exhibit area, barely more than a balcony.

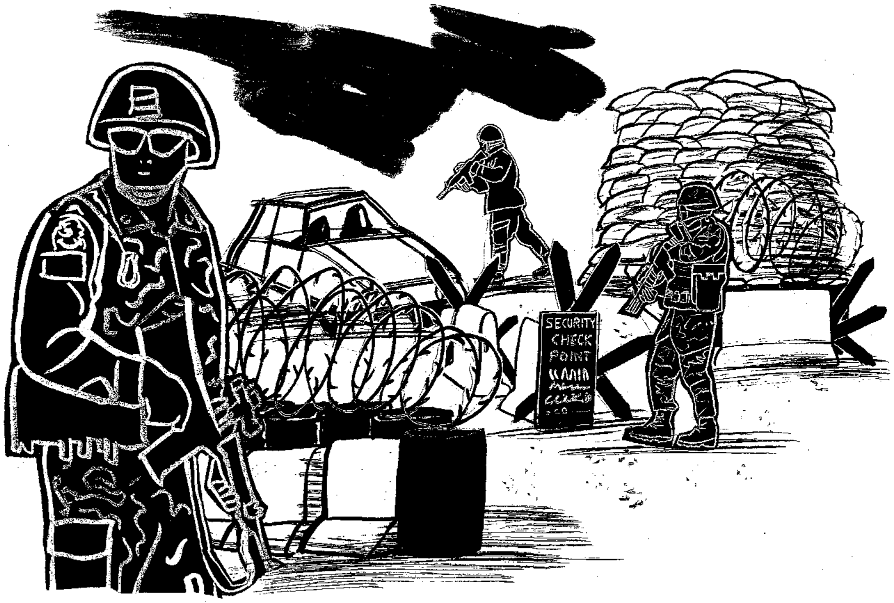
In keeping their architectural tricks away from most of the art, Sejima and Nishizawa establish a certain kinship with the original building of the Museum of Modern Art, by Philip Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone. When that building burst onto West Fifty-third Street, in 1939, you could create excitement simply by sticking a modern building into a row of brownstones. The New Museum, similarly, derives its drama from the way it breaks with its surroundings. The original Modern lost much of its architectural power from the nineteen-fifties onward, as the brownstones gave way to a series of additions extending the museum up and down the block, and modernism became the new architecture lingua franca. Right now, the New Museum looks, as the Modern once did, like a thunderbolt from another world, but, as the spread of condos and boutique hotels across the Lower East Side continues, it is at risk of becoming a victim of its own success. ♦

OBSESSED

"Redacted," "Love in the Time of Cholera," and "Margot at the Wedding."

BY DAVID DENBY

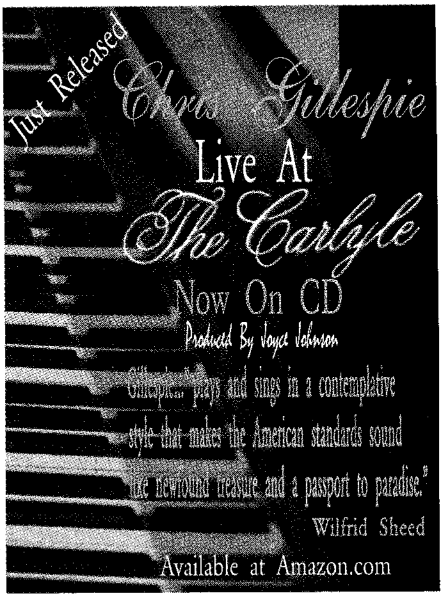
Everyone complains about media overload, but no one, including me, wants to give up access to magazines, newspapers, TV, blogs, or Web sites—the thousands of sources of urgent or frivolous assertion. We are caught, willy-nilly, between hunger and surfeit, curiosity and dismay. I assume that Brian De Palma's fascinating but strangely tormented "Redacted" was made in something like this ambivalent mood. It's based on actual events—the rape and murder of a fourteen-year-old girl, and the murder of her family, involving five members of a U.S. Army platoon, near Baghdad, in March, 2006. (Four men have been convicted, and one is awaiting trial.) De Palma has made a fiction out of the events, creating characters and situations whose precise nature he inferred from blogs, soldiers' videos, and news reports. And he has realized his fictional version with fictional visuals: a video diary made by one of the soldiers; a terrorist Web site showing the murder of the platoon's master sergeant; a portentous French documentary complete with stern Baroque music; and so on. De Palma told a similar story in the 1989 "Casualties of War"—a squad captures, violates, and kills a Vietnamese girl—but in that movie he shaped everything into an uninterrupted flow of emotionally upsetting but physically beautiful narrative. He must now feel that neither a unified Hollywood treatment of such a story nor the aesthetic softening that beauty provides is still possible—that such an experience can't simply be told but must be jaggedly assembled through clumsy, off-center representation. The movie is a grimly mischievous emblem of our media-blitzed world.



Brian De Palma's new movie looks at a U.S. Army platooon in Iraq.

TOM BACHTELL

"Redacted" is a low-budget experimental film without stars, although there are remnants of the traditional Second World War platoon movie. The rough vessels of democracy here include a house intellectual, who reads John O'Hara and stays out of trouble; the diarist, who thinks his video will get him into film school; two racist buffoons; and a straight arrow named Lawyer McCoy, who tries to argue them out of what they want to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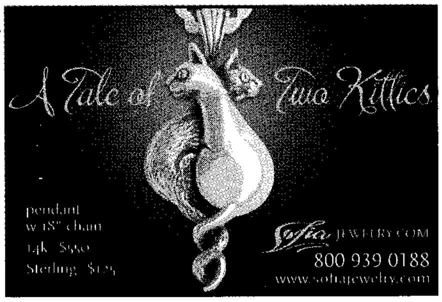
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do. The men have some happy moments, but they're generally in terrible shape—scared, trigger-happy, and quick to launch ritual accusations of faggotry or pussydom at anyone who doesn't want to do something violent. They don't know why they are in Iraq; they "do their job" as narrowly defined, which often means doing it blindly, senselessly—shooting at a frightened driver who runs through a checkpoint, for instance. When the sergeant is killed by a bomb, the two thugs, terrified, release their fear by assaulting the most vulnerable and innocent person around, a teen-age girl.

"Redacted" is hell to sit through, but I think De Palma is bravely trying to imagine his way inside an atrocity, and that he's onto something powerful with his multisided approach. The French documentary frames the events impassively, as timeless tragedies of war. The diarist, in his amiable desire to become a filmmaker, doesn't realize at first that thrusting a camera between himself and a murder cannot absolve him of complicity in the crime. Finally, the terrorist video is itself an act of violence. In other words, the mock-documentary material moves from observation to complicity to participation. The movie interrogates itself. De Palma is caught in the coils of the problem: how do you register and create outrage at a crime without seeming to capitalize on it?

"Redacted" takes all kinds of risks, and so it's perhaps not surprising that it has already been charged with fomenting anti-Americanism, or that De Palma himself has been accused of exploitation. But the movie explores an issue that has been debated for years, by Susan Sontag, among others—the morality of visual representations of atrocity—and it comes off as the opposite of exploitation. De Palma exposes no flesh, and illuminates the assault with only a flickering, wavering light; the murders take place off-camera. In all, the assault excites nothing but disgust. None of us particularly want to hear what "Redacted" has to say, including liberals who criticize the war but regard the soldiers as noble victims. De Palma suggests, by contrast, that some soldiers have become demoralized by the incoherent war policy and have fallen into criminal behavior—an unpleasant idea, but hardly, after Abu Ghraib and Haditha, a lie. To transfer the anger engendered by the movie to the moviemaker himself is to allow one's feelings to blur what's on the screen.

In "Love in the Time of Cholera," Mike Newell's adaptation of Gabriel García Márquez's great 1985 novel, Florentino Ariza—a hustling, excitable teenage boy living in late-nineteenth-century Colombia—catches sight of a pretty rich girl, Fermina Daza, and falls in love with her forever. Some years go by, and they exchange many letters, but Florentino (Javier Bardem) loses Fermina (Giovanna Mezzogiorno) to another man, the aristocratic young doctor Juvenal Urbino (Benjamin Bratt). Trailing around after her, Florentino languishes in his soul while carrying on innumerable meaningless affairs. We can take it on faith, I guess, that his eternal love is based on that first impression—after all, Dante claimed to be inspired his whole life by a quick look at Beatrice when he was nine and she was eight. Florentino is a bit of a poet, too, and obsession like his, one would think, is its own reward; that is, the benefit of the obsession is precisely the exquisite emotions of longing and suffering. But that's not García Márquez's idea. He's a romantic, not a Freudian; and Florentino is no commonplace neurotic. The book, moving toward its triumphant conclusion, is a wonder. The long, magnificently adorned sentences—a stately river depositing alluvial riches of Colombian culture, décor, sexuality, humor, and manners into the reader's heart—are as intoxicating a literary experience as any available to us.

Alas, the movie doesn't have that rich allusiveness or strong dose of foolish passion. It's a well-crafted, handsome period piece, and pleasant to watch, but the intensity of an obsessional style—something that matches Florentino's crazy single-mindedness—is beyond Newell's range. The director of "Donnie Brasco" and "Four Weddings and a Funeral" doesn't paint with the camera; he doesn't seize on certain visual motifs, as he should, and turn them into the equivalent of a lover's devotion to fetishes. He's a realist handling comically extravagant material, and he does little more than competently frame a mixed set of performances. As the doctor, Benjamin Bratt looks good in a goatee, a high, floating collar, and a black cutaway coat, and Giovanna Mezzogiorno has the reserve needed to make Fermina's beauty feel inaccessible. Javier Bardem, however, is misdirected. He drags himself about the city with his shoulders sagging. He's woebegone, and the scenes of women eagerly pulling him into bed are puzzling in the extreme—he's so stricken that it seems more likely they'd want to take him home and give him hot *sopa de pollo* instead.

There are many ways of frustrating and boring an audience, but setting up a bunch of characters who are so inept that they can't hit a croquet ball, or run through the woods without tripping, or chop down a tree without the tree's landing on a wedding tent may be the most infuriating way of all. Noah Baumbach's new movie, "Margot at the Wedding," is about a family that can't do anything right. Margot (Nicole Kidman), a novelist with a disconcerting habit of sticking verbal knives into people, shows up at the house of her unhappy sister, Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh), who is about to marry an out-of-work artist and rocker, Malcolm (Jack Black). Misery, confusion, and much stumbling about ensue. The sisters go at each other furiously; Malcolm hates himself and throws wailing fits; Margot bombards her son with confidences that he should not be hearing. Baumbach, who made the heartbreaking "The Squid and the Whale," is trying for a mood of Bergmanesque candor and laceration. The movie is even set on a Bergmanesque island—leafless and cold. There is nothing inviting or pleasurable here. If a director is throwing a house party, and has his most spiteful, loudmouthed, and inappropriate friends over, some of us may want to leave.

Pauline, a lifelong screwup, resents Margot's habit of dropping incidents from the family's life into her fictions. Baumbach was known to have drawn on his parents' divorce for "The Squid and the Whale," so there may be some sort of unburdening going on here. But there's no way of telling whether Margot is a good writer or a bad one, or whether she has made creative use of her family or merely exploited it; Pauline's complaint, like many others, just sits there, like dishes left unwashed after dinner. The characters observe no boundaries, and neither does the movie—Baumbach hasn't worked out the struggle between speaking and withholding, as Bergman did. People simply blurt out scathing remarks, so there's little power in the revelations and betrayals. "Margot" is sensually as well as dramatically impoverished. Couldn't the bedraggled couple at least have had the wedding in spring or summer, when there's a little color to look at? The dun-shaded chromatic scheme seems part of the general haplessness; it's as if even nature were a flop. ♦

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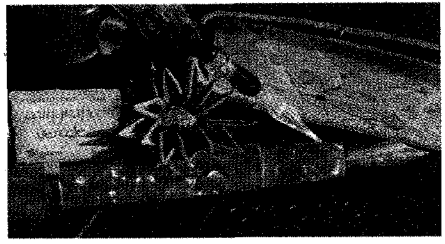

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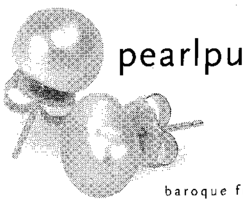

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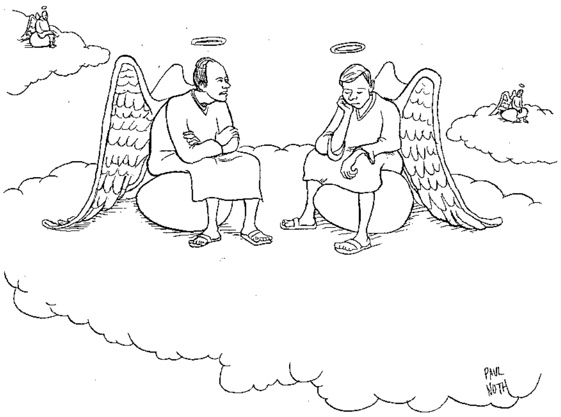
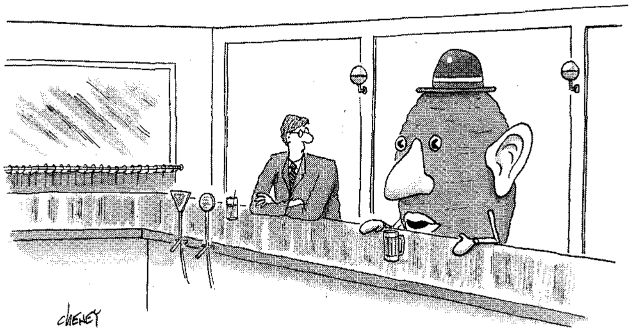


"I always figured Hell would be less ironic."
Ben Snyder, Charlottesville, Va.



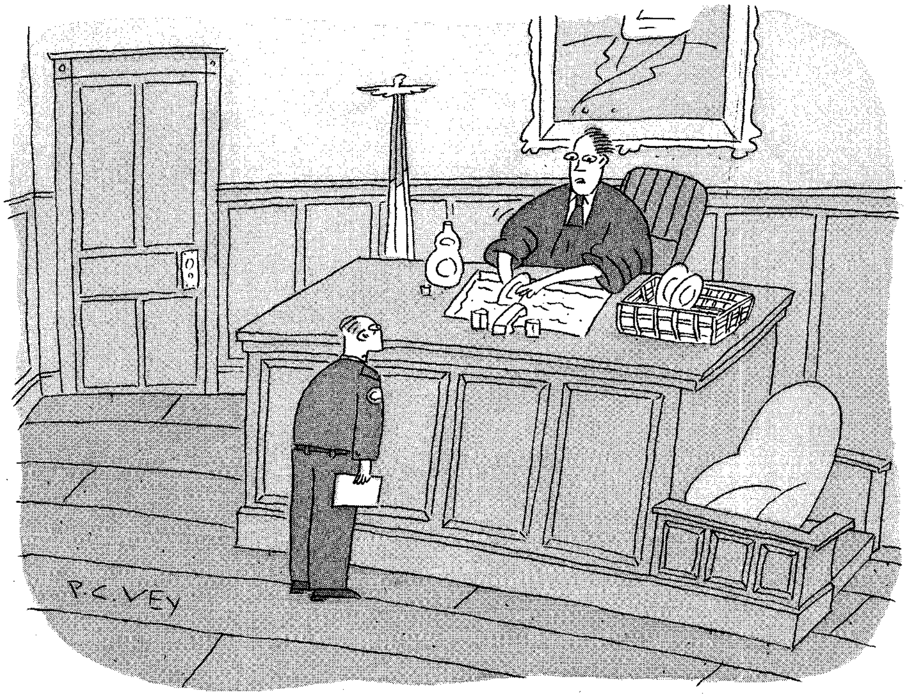
THE FINALISTS

"If I start to drink too much, just pull off my lips."
Lynn Tudor, New York City

"My wife left me for Mr. Peanut."
Marla Mercer, Goleta, Calif.

"I should have stopped after the Botox."
Sue Clifton, Pittsburgh, Pa.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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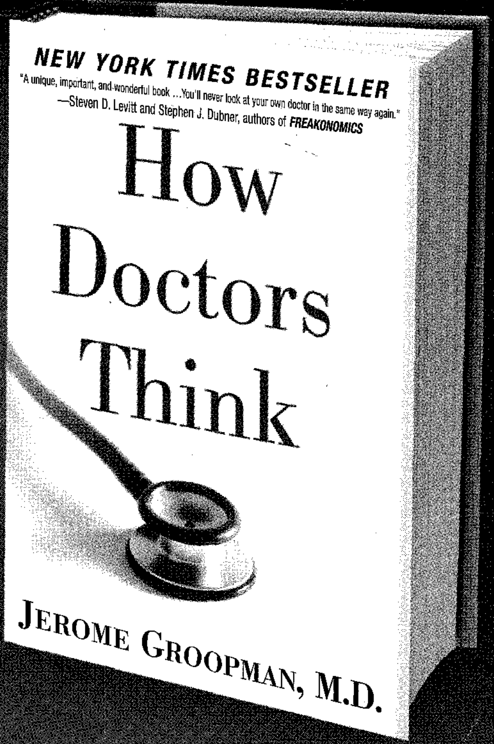
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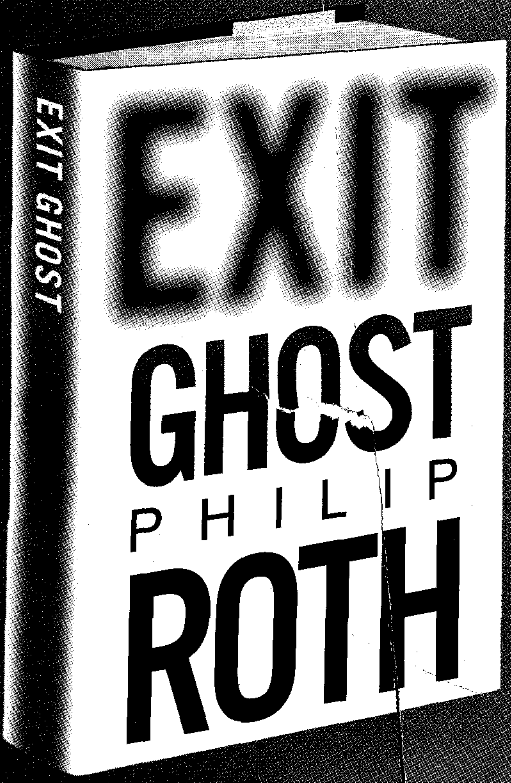
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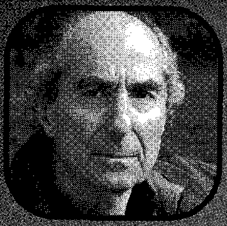

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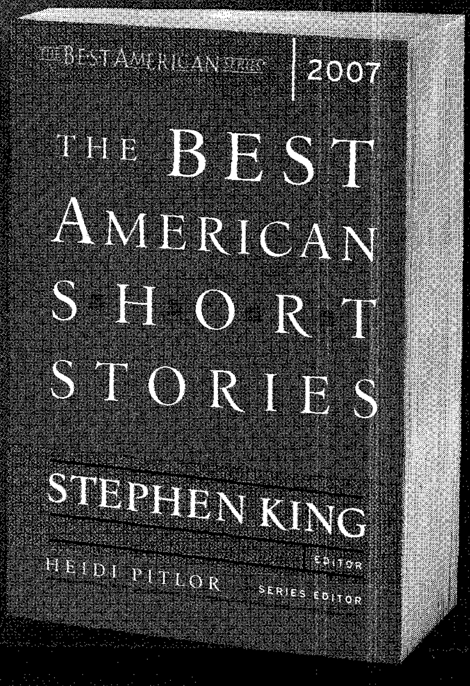
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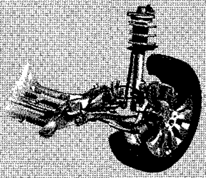

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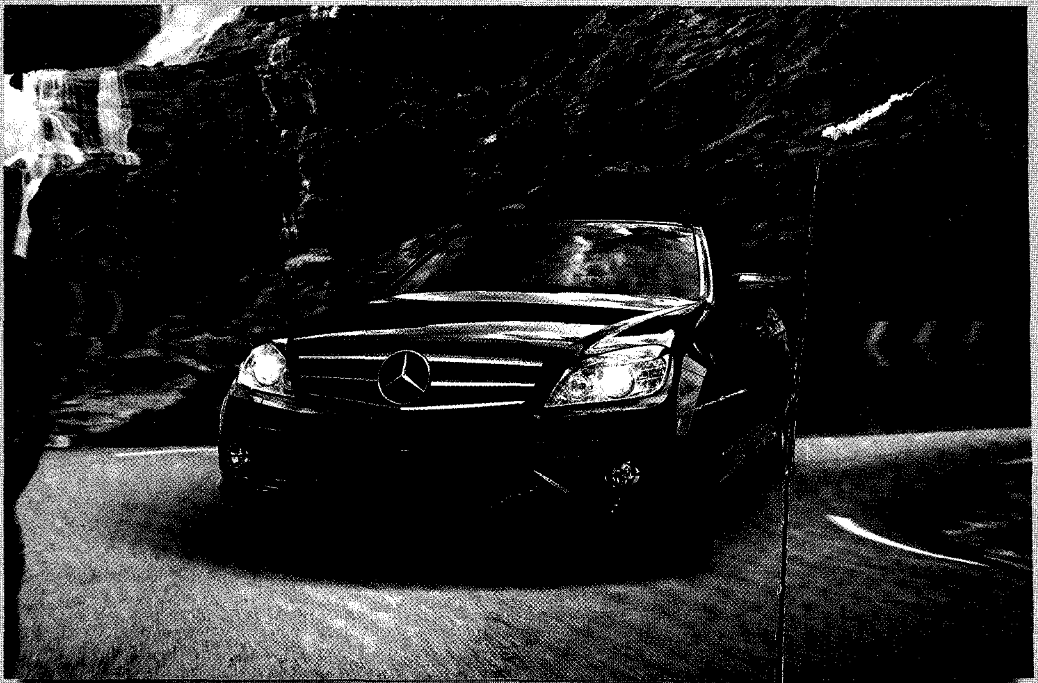

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